



Drowning, Can You Identify The Symptoms?

In 2012, 137 children younger than 15 years drowned in a pool or spa during the traditional summer season from Memorial Day to Labor Day. An additional 168 children of that age required emergency response for near-fatal incidents during that period. At least 100 of the 137 children who drowned were younger than five. Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional death among children one to four years of age. 54 of these drowning have occurred soon after the children left an adult who was in their immediate vicinity, and 31 children drowned despite the presence of others at the pool.

Drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid.

Near drowning is the survival of a drowning event involving unconsciousness or water inhalation and can lead to serious secondary complications or death, possibly up to 72 hours after the event.

Drowning Doesn't Look Like Drowning

A drowning person may be harder to spot than you think. Drowning usually doesn't involve someone crying for help. It's difficult to identify because it's so quiet. The waving, splashing, and yelling as seen on television is rarely the same in real life.



1. Except in rare circumstances, drowning people are physiologically unable to call out for help. The respiratory system was designed for breathing. Speech is the secondary or overlaid function. Breathing must be fulfilled before speech occurs.
2. Drowning people's mouths alternately sink below and reappear above the surface of the water. The mouths of drowning people are not above the surface of the water long enough for them to exhale, inhale, and call out for help. When the drowning people's mouths are above the surface, they exhale and inhale quickly as their mouths start to sink below the surface of the water.
3. Drowning people cannot wave for help. Nature instinctively forces them to extend their arms laterally and press down on the water's surface. Pressing down on the surface of the water permits drowning people to leverage their bodies so they can lift their mouths out of the water to breathe.
4. Throughout the Instinctive Drowning Response, drowning people cannot voluntarily control their arm movements. Physiologically, drowning people who are struggling on the surface of the water cannot stop drowning and perform voluntary movements such as waving for help, moving toward a rescuer, or reaching out for a piece of rescue equipment.

5. From beginning to end of the Instinctive Drowning Response people's bodies remain upright in the water, with no evidence of a supporting kick. Unless rescued by a trained lifeguard, these drowning people can only struggle on the surface of the water from 20 to 60 seconds before submersion occurs."

Note: This doesn't mean that a person that is yelling for help and thrashing isn't in real trouble—they are experiencing aquatic distress. Not always present before the Instinctive Drowning Response, aquatic distress doesn't last long—but unlike true drowning, these victims can still assist in their own rescue. They can grab lifelines, throw rings, etc.

Look for these other signs of drowning when people are in the water:

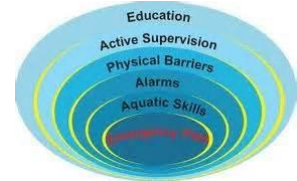
- Head low in the water, mouth at water level
- Head tilted back with mouth open
- Eyes glassy and empty, unable to focus
- Eyes closed
- Hair over forehead or eyes
- Not using legs—vertical
- Hyperventilating or gasping
- Trying to swim in a particular direction but not making headway
- Trying to roll over on the back
- Appear to be climbing an invisible ladder

Who is likely to drown, when, and where?

- Drowning is the third leading cause of accidental death in the United States. It is the second leading cause of accidental death in school-age children, and the number one cause of death in preschoolers.
- More than half of drowning deaths occur in swimming pools.
- One-quarter to one-third of drowning victims have had swimming lessons.
- Infants younger one year of age usually drown in bathtubs because they are not coordinated or strong enough to lift themselves or their heads out of the water.
- Children aged 1-4 most often drown in swimming pools.
- As children age, the percentages that drown in natural water such as rivers, lakes, ponds, and oceans begins to increase. For those older than age 15, 65% of drowning's occurring in natural water.
- Alcohol is a factor in up to half of adolescent and adult drowning deaths
- Nearly 80% of people who die from drowning are male

Drowning Prevention

- Learning to swim should be a priority for all children and people of all ages
- Never leave an infant unattended near water (Bath tubs, pools, toilets and landscaping features)
- Never leave a child unattended near water, whether a swimming pool or natural water
- When participating in water sports, use a personal floatation device (life jacket)
- Never swim alone (use the buddy system)
- Responsible adult to supervise all water activities
- A home swimming pool should always be fenced and secure
- Learn how to identify the symptoms of drowning



It's scary to think that someone might drown without anyone noticing, but it just reinforces why we need to be diligent when it comes to water safety.

*This information is provided to you by the IES Safety Committee