

Safety tips for swimmers

Swimming injuries, drownings and deaths are preventable by following simple safety rules. These rules apply around all bodies of water, from the beaches to private pools and bathtubs. Any pools with public access must comply with the BC Pool Regulation.

How can I stay safe when swimming?

Look for and read the signs

Follow the posted safety information. Signs and rules are there to protect you and to keep pools clean and germ-free.

Walk, do not run

Never run on the pool deck. This area can be very slippery, especially when wet.

Be careful getting in and out of the pool

Use a handrail if possible and avoid climbing on slippery or unstable surfaces.

Look before you leap or dive in

Shallow water, underwater logs or big rocks are dangerous when you dive or jump in. Look for no diving signs. Check the area each time before you enter the water, as swimming conditions may change. Shallow water, underwater logs or big rocks can cause serious injury.

Stay within your abilities

Swim only where you feel comfortable. Do not go farther or deeper than you can handle. At beaches stay inside marked areas or close to shore. Cold water or rough conditions may impact your swimming abilities.

Never swim alone

Use the “buddy system.” Have a strong swimmer with you, even if there is a lifeguard.

Play carefully

If you lost consciousness after hitting your head against pool walls or rocks, you could drown.

Do not drink alcohol

Injuries involving alcohol are a common problem around water bodies, including include private pools, hot tubs, beaches and swimming holes. Alcohol slows down your reaction time and could put you to sleep, which is dangerous and can lead to more or worse accidents, which is especially dangerous in a hot tub. Do not drink alcohol around water bodies.

Be aware of suction hazards

Never play around pool drains or skimmers. The filter pulls water through a drain and into pipes. Fingers, toes, arms, legs, torsos and hair could catch in the suction of these drains, causing drowning. Tie back long hair or wear a swim cap. Never put your head underwater in a whirlpool or hot tub.

Watch for underwater traps

Some railings, ladders or removable pool equipment can create small spaces that can trap people underwater. Sometimes getting trapped under water will lead to drowning. If you notice underwater equipment that could trap you, alert a pool supervisor, owner or lifeguard.

Be aware of natural hazards

Bodies of water such as lakes, rivers and oceans may have unknown dangers. This includes underwater logs, sudden drop offs, algae blooms or tidal currents. Obey posted warnings and ask other people if they know of any trouble spots in the area. Contact a local government or health unit for information on recreational water quality testing.

Take a first aid course

Take a first aid course that teaches:

- Rescue breathing
- Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) – adult and child
- Self-rescue and skills for rescuing others

Many agencies offer these courses. See St. John Ambulance at www.sja.ca/en/first-aid-training/find-your-course.

Wear life jackets/Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

Always wear life jackets or PFDs on boats or docks. PFDs can be worn for swimming, but never replace adult supervision. Check the label for Transport Canada approval, and the right size for your weight.

How can I protect my child?

Never leave your child alone near water

Drowning is silent and can happen in seconds, even in just a few centimetres of water (e.g. bathtub). 'Non-swimmers' and young children (0-12 years old) need constant supervision by a responsible adult. Keep small children within arm's reach of a responsible person (at least 16 years old). Babies who cannot sit without support and cannot wear a PFD should always be held by an adult. Older children (12-17 years old) should use the "buddy system."

Never let children play in hot tubs

Hot water can quickly affect a child's small body. Limit the time a child spends in a hot tub. See [HealthLinkBC File #27a Residential Hot tubs and pools: Health and safety tips](#).

Use sunscreen

Protect your children from UV rays (Ultraviolet Radiation). Wear sun protective clothing, seek shade and use water-resistant sunscreen. Re-apply sunscreen often. See [HealthLinkBC File #26 Sun Safety for Children](#).

How can I make my pool safe?

Fence off your pool

Make sure there is an enclosure such as a fence at least 1.5m (5ft) high around your pool with a gate that a child cannot open. Keep gates closed and locked to protect your child and

other children in the neighbourhood. Check any local government bylaws on pool safety.

Cover drains and suction hazards

Make sure drain covers are specifically designed to prevent suction hazards. Do not use a pool if the drain cover is missing. Make sure that any replacement cover is identical to the original or ask a qualified pool consultant to find an equivalent.

Keep your pool clean

Dirty pools grow bacteria and other germs. Keep your pool clean by:

- Wash or shower before entering a pool. Do not track dirt into the pool
- Wear a proper bathing suit, not street clothes or underwear
- Use a reusable or disposable swim diaper
- Wait 48 hours after symptoms like diarrhea, vomiting, open sore(s), bandages, colds, ear/nose discharge or ear infections end
- Never bring food or drinks in the pool. This can create bacteria and attract pests
- Do not use breakables such as glasses or ceramic dishes in the pool. If these break, you will need to drain the pool
- Follow the operation and maintenance instructions for the pool circulation system

Accessibility

Make sure all individuals who will use your pool or hot tub can easily get in and out.

Plan for safety

Check for hidden dangers. Fix any broken fittings or sharp edges before anyone uses the pool. Have rescue equipment handy, like ropes or floatation devices (safety ring).