

Staying Safe – In the Water

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC—safer, healthier people.

[Marcus Durham] Summer's finally here. That might mean you're going to be on the water, in the water, or on the road. Maybe you're planning to enjoy a little bit of it all. This podcast on Summertime Safety was created by CDC's Injury Center to help keep you and your family healthy and safe. We hope you enjoy your summer and all the activities that go along with the season.

Dr. Julie Gilchrist, a pediatrician and medical epidemiologist from CDC's Injury Center, is joining me today to talk about staying safe in the water. Welcome to the show, Dr. Gilchrist.

[Dr. Gilchrist] Thanks for inviting me.

[Marcus Durham] When most of us are having fun in the pool, at the lake, or at the beach, injuries aren't the first thing on our minds. But research on water-related injuries shows we need to take safety precautions in and around the water. Dr. Gilchrist, how big a problem is water-related injury in the U.S.?

[Dr. Gilchrist] In 2005, drowning claimed about ten lives a day. That's a total of about thirty-five-hundred deaths a year.

[Marcus Durham] Ten fatal drownings a day—that's quite a toll.

[Dr. Gilchrist] It is. And the number doesn't include the additional 710 people who died in boating-related incidents the same year. Also, keep in mind that not every drowning victim dies. Even those who survive drowning can suffer brain damage and have other lifelong problems as a result.

[Marcus Durham] Do most victims drown in pools or in natural bodies of water, like lakes and oceans?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Common locations of drownings vary by the age of the victim. Young children, from about one to four years of age, are most likely to drown in residential swimming pools. As the age goes up, so does the number of victims who drown in natural- or open- water settings, like lakes, rivers, and the ocean.

[Marcus Durham] You mentioned young children. Is this a problem that affects primarily children or people of all ages?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Anyone of any age or swimming ability can drown. But drowning is the second-leading cause of injury death for children ages one to fourteen. About a quarter of all fatal drowning victims- and three quarters of victims treated in emergency departments are fourteen or

younger. And among all ages, almost 60 percent are either hospitalized or transferred for a higher level of care, compared with 4 percent hospitalized for other types of injuries.

[Marcus Durham] Of course, parents want to protect their kids and keep them safe. Are there things adults can watch out for when supervising kids around the water?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Children should always be closely supervised when they're around the water. If you're responsible for watching kids, avoid distracting activities that can take your attention away. Things like playing cards, reading books, or talking on the phone can keep you from noticing that a child has quietly slipped under. Drownings happen quickly, and usually silently.

[Marcus Durham] Backyard pools seem to be dangerous for young children. Are there things that can help make them safer?

[Dr. Gilchrist] If you're a parent with both small children and a pool at home, make safety a priority. CDC recommends installing a protective barrier, like a four-sided fence, around the pool to keep kids away from the area when you don't expect them to be in or around the water. Pool fences should be at least four-feet tall. And, to be safe, they need to completely separate the house and the play area from the pool. And latches should be out of children's reach. Things like automatic door locks and alarms can help keep a fenced pool area off-limits and alert you if a busy, active child gets out of the house. Also, keep toys, like balls and floats, out of the pool and surrounding area when you're not around. Toys are always tempting to curious kids, and they can lure small children toward the pool.

[Marcus Durham] Thanks for the suggestions for keeping the pool area safer. What can those of us headed to the beach this summer do to stay safe?

[Dr. Gilchrist] In the ocean, rip currents are the biggest threat. Rip currents form where water pushed on shore by the waves makes a fast moving channel back out to sea. Choppy, foamy, or debris-filled water can signal a rip current. If you're ever caught in a rip current, swim parallel to the shore until you're free, and then swim toward the shore.

At the beach, it's ideal to pick swimming areas that are supervised by trained and certified lifeguards. Also, whether you're at the pool, the beach, or the lake, remember that air- or foam-filled toys, like arm floats or inner tubes, aren't life-saving devices. Adults and kids shouldn't rely on these toys to keep them afloat or use them in place of properly-fitted life jackets.

[Marcus Durham] Can learning CPR help?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Yes. Being trained in CPR can make a big difference. Let's say someone is drowning and you dial 911 right away. It'll still take a few minutes for paramedics to arrive on the scene, and during those few minutes, performing CPR can *really* make a difference by helping a person stay alive and have the best possible outcome - little or no brain damage. We think everyone should know CPR and basic first aid.

[Marcus Durham] What role do swimming lessons play in drowning prevention?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Swimming lessons are important, but aren't enough. That's why fences are necessary when kids aren't supposed to be in the water and supervision is critical when they are. It's important that swimming lessons don't give parents and children a false sense of security. The younger a child is, the less a parent can rely on swimming lessons to keep their children safe - especially babies, toddlers, and pre-school children. As kids get older, having swimming lessons helps them know their abilities and at least some basics of water safety.

[Marcus Durham] Dr. Gilchrist, thanks so much for sharing this important safety information with our listeners. We hope you made a note of some helpful tips to keep you and your family safe in the water this summer. Remember, for more information on water safety and injury prevention, visit www.cdc.gov/Injury.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.