



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Learn to Swim

Drowning — United States, 2005–2009

Recorded: June 19 2012; posted: June 21, 2012

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

As the weather warms, families will be heading to pools and beaches to try and beat the heat. However, drowning is among the leading causes of unintentional death worldwide. Dr. Julie Gilchrist is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, and she's joining us today to discuss ways to prevent drowning. Welcome to the show, Julie.

[Dr. Gilchrist] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Julie, we hear the term 'drowning' all the time. What does it really mean?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Drowning is a process caused by submersion or immersion in liquid, but it's a brain injury from lack of oxygen, and it can kill you but if you survive, it can result in things like learning disabilities, memory problems, or a permanent loss of basic functioning.

[Dr. Gaynes] How many people drown each year in the United States?

[Dr. Gilchrist] More than 3,800 people fatally drown each year, but almost 5,800 are seen in the emergency department for non-fatal injuries.

[Dr. Gaynes] What groups most commonly drown?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Children four and younger have the highest rates of drowning, but other groups at risk include males that make up 80 percent of drowning victims, and African Americans drown at higher rates than other race ethnicities.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where do most drownings occur --- at the pool, the beach, the lake -- where?

[Dr. Gilchrist] It varies by age group. Young children most commonly drown in swimming pools, but as we age, natural water settings become more common, including lakes, rivers, and the ocean.

[Dr. Gaynes] Julie, how can parents help prevent kids from drowning?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Well, there's two common problems. The first is when kids aren't supposed to be in the water, and this is when things like barriers, like swimming pool fences, door locks, and door alarms are key. When children are supposed to be in the water, then that's when supervision and swimming skill can help kids safe.

[Dr. Gaynes] At what age should a person start getting swimming lessons?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Well the American Academy of Pediatrics now encourages as young as age one to begin swimming lessons, especially if they have access to water, like a backyard pool.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about preventing drowning?

[Dr. Gilchrist] They can go to www.cdc.gov and type "water related injuries" in the search box.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Julie. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Julie Gilchrist about the ways to prevent drowning. Remember, when children aren't supposed to be in the water, supervision isn't enough. Barriers, like fences around pools, need to be in place. When children are in the water, supervision and swimming skills can keep them safe. Swimming lessons at an early age can help prevent drowning.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

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