



Drowning Prevention

Playing in the water is fun – and it is one of our favorite activities in Florida. Unfortunately, Florida also had the fourth highest rate of overall unintentional drownings in the United States (between 2015 and 2019).

We at Orlando Health want you to enjoy Florida's water activities and to be safe while playing.

The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around water is to learn to swim.

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Home Pools

- Install a four-sided fence that completely separates the house from the pool area. The fence should have self-closing and self-latching gates, and latches should be out of children's reach.
- Consider an alarm system to alert you if someone enters the pool area.
- Keep pool free of floats and balls that might tempt children to enter the pool unsupervised.
- If a child is "missing" – always check the pool first. Scan the entire bottom and surface as well as the surrounding area.

Natural Water

- Swim in supervised areas only.
- Always enter the water "feet first" and look before jumping to be sure no one is in the way.
- Obey posted warning flags, and stay away from piers, pilings and jetties.
- Keep a lookout for and avoid aquatic life.

Boating

(Includes personal watercraft, rafting, kiteboarding, snorkeling, etc.)

- Wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket:
 - **Type I: Offshore Life Jacket** Designed for open ocean, rough waters or remote areas. They turn most unconscious wearers to a vertical position.
 - **Type II: Near Shore Life Jacket** Designed for inland waters. They may turn most unconscious wearers to a vertical position. They are less buoyant than Type I, but are more comfortable to wear.
 - **Type III: Flotation Aids** Designed for calm inland waters or for the specialized sport that is marked on the device. Type III is more comfortable for active water sports than Types I and II.
 - **Type IV: Throwable Devices** Designed to be thrown to a victim in an emergency. They are not intended to take the place of wearing a life jacket.
- Do not ride in a boat operated by someone who has been drinking.
- Attend a boating course (some examples include Red Cross, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Sailing) to learn navigation rules and emergency procedures.

Layers of Protection

Layer 1: Supervision

Supervision, the first and most crucial layer of protection, means someone is always actively watching when a child is in the pool.

Layer 2: Barriers

A child should never be able to enter the pool area unaccompanied by a guardian. Barriers physically block a child from the pool.

Barriers include: child-proof locks on all doors, a pool fence with self-latching and self-closing gates, and door and pool alarms. Pool covers may also be used, but make sure it is a professional cover, fitted for your pool.

A simple canvas covering can be a drowning hazard and entrap a child in the water.

Layer 3: Emergency Preparedness

The moment a child stops breathing there is a small, precious window of time in which resuscitation may occur. But only if someone knows what to do.

Even if you're not a parent, it's important to learn CPR. The techniques are easy to learn and can mean the difference between life and death. **In an emergency, it is critical to have a phone nearby and immediately call 911.**

Florida Requirements

The Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act (Chapter 515, Florida Statutes) requires one of the following pool safety measures for pools built after October 1, 2000:

- A pool fence with self-closing, self-latching gate – enclosing the pool and providing no direct access to it.
- An approved pool cover.
- Alarms on all doors and windows leading out to the pool.
- All doors providing direct access from the home to pool to have a self-closing, self-latching device with a release mechanism no lower than 54 inches above the floor.

The Department of Health recommends, at a minimum, using a combination of barriers described above to help ensure your pool is equipped with approved safety features.

National Facts Regarding Drowning

A breakdown of the statistics into age groups shows that in children ages 1 to 4, Florida has the highest rate of accidental drowning in the nation from 2017 to 2019 combined.

- Swimming pools are the most common site of accidental drowning.
- In 83% of cases, the child was estimated to be missing for 11–12 minutes.

The incidence of drowning in natural water settings increases with age. According to the CDC, more than half of fatal and nonfatal drownings among people 15 years and older occur in natural waters like lakes, rivers or oceans. In 2021, the U.S. Coast Guard counted 4,439 boating incidents with 658 deaths and 2,641 injuries.

- Alcohol use played a role in one out of five boating fatalities.
- Nearly nine out of 10 drowning victims were not wearing life jackets.

References and Resources

FloridaHealth.gov/Programs-and-Services/Prevention/Drowning-PreventionRedCross.org/WaterSafetyWaterProofFL.com

CDC.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Water-Safety/WaterInjuries-FactSheet.html

NLM.NIH.gov/medlineplus/WaterSafetyRecreational.html

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