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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Teen drowning can be prevented with safety measures

Every summer, the news includes reports about youths who drowned while swimming in a local lake or pool. Many had been with friends or family who tried their best to save them.

Although drowning can be prevented, it remains the second most common cause of accidental injury and death in 15- to 19-year-olds, according to U.S. data. Boys this age are much more likely to drown than girls, notes the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Most drownings happen in lakes, rivers and ponds.

Following are top causes of drowning deaths and injuries in older children.

- **Risky games.** One water game challenges swimmers to hold their breath for as long as possible under water. Some kids try swimming as many pool laps under water as they can without coming up for air. Called a “shallow water blackout,” swimmers lose consciousness and drown.

- **Alcohol.** More than 20% of drowning injuries in 15- to 19-year-olds are tied to alcohol use.

- **Boating.** Drowning can be prevented in nearly all cases when boating if lifejackets are worn. All boaters are advised to wear lifejackets, even if they consider themselves strong swimmers. The AAP encourages parents to set a positive example and wear a lifejacket. Adolescents are 20 times more likely to wear a life jacket when they see an adult wearing one, according to a study of Washington state boaters.

- **Unsafe water.** Swimmers should be advised to obey warning flags and signs before entering natural bodies of water. Unsafe water conditions such as rip currents can sweep the strongest swimmers farther out from the shore. Teach children how to recognize a rip current and to swim parallel to the shore until they are out of the current. (See related story at <http://aapnews.aapublications.org/content/32/5/25.6.full>.)

The AAP urges parents to enroll children ages 4 and older in swim lessons and make sure they learn water survival skills. Adolescents should never swim alone. They should swim with a friend, preferably in water with lifeguard supervision.

— Trisha Koriath



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