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Some kids have higher drowning risk: Swim lessons add layer of protection for all

by Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer

Can your child swim? Can you?

All parents and children over 1 year old should learn to swim, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). This is especially important if your child is at a high risk of drowning.

Your child should learn basic swim skills: entering the water, coming to the surface, turning around, propelling through the water for at least 25 yards and being able to exit the water.

Swim lessons do not "drown-proof" any child or adult. Swim skills do add a layer of protection. Other ways to protect your child from drowning include four-sided fencing around water, life jackets, active supervision and lifeguards. Safety barriers should be kept in place during swim and non-swim times, according to the AAP.

Drowning is more common for children ages 1-4 years and 15-19 years. Behavioral health, skill, environment, underlying medical conditions and race also raise a child's risk, according to the AAP.

African-American children have the highest drowning rates. According to a national study, 64% of African-American children and 78% of African-American parents have little or no swimming ability.

The risk of drowning also is high for children with autism who are prone to wandering. Drowning is the cause of death for almost three-fourths of children with autism who wander off alone. The AAP recommends a family supervision plan for children with autism and other special needs. Have a checklist of nearby ponds, lakes and pools to search if a child wanders. Download an emergency plan at <http://bit.ly/WanderingPlanAutism>.

Parents and children say that fear of drowning is a common reason why they do not swim. Ask your pediatrician for ways to help if your child is fearful.

To find swim lessons, contact your local parks and recreation facility or YMCA. Many communities have free or low-cost programs. Swim programs are tailored to meet cultural, religious, physical and mental health needs. Local faith-based organizations also can offer suggestions on swim accommodations that meet your family's beliefs and traditions.

Find more swim safety information at www.healthychildren.org.

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- [AAP News story "Tailored guidance for families key to prevention of drowning: updated policy"](#)