

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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San Mateo County Health Department

A Drowning Happens in Seconds

San Mateo County Health Department Issues Water Watcher Tags

SAN MATEO, Calif. – Drowning is the leading cause of death and injury of children 5 years of age and under in California. To increase water-safety awareness and assist with the recreational water supervision of children, San Mateo County Health Department’s Injury Prevention Program is distributing WATER WATCHER tags. The adult, who wears the WATER WATCHER tag is the “designated watcher” whose main responsibility is to supervise the children, *undistracted* (no reading, working on the computer, or talking on the phone). If the WATER WATCHER needs to leave the area, they must hand off the tag to another adult, who then assumes supervision responsibilities. This simple act of wearing the WATER WATCHER tag and passing it on is intended to eliminate the potential for children being left unsupervised, while other adults assume that “someone else” is watching over them.

Children under one year most often drown in bathtubs, buckets or toilets. Drowning in residential swimming pools is most common for children between the ages of 1 to 4 years. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that most young children who had drowned in residential pools were last seen in the home, had been out of sight for less than five minutes, and were in the care of one or both parents at the time of the incident.

Drowning is silent and fast. Supervision is a child’s best protection. “Close supervision of young children around any body of water is essential,” states Dr. Anand Chabra, San Mateo County’s Director of Maternal Child and Adolescent Health. “A young child can drown in as little as 1-2 inches of water.”

The Drowning Prevention Foundation (www.drowningpreventionfoundation.us) recommends the following safety guidelines:

- Never leave a child unattended near water even for just a few seconds to answer the telephone, attend another child, or work on household chores.
- Closely watch young children playing in or near any body of water, wading pond, public pool, bathtub, or lake.
- At large gatherings designate an adult to watch children at play, and while in the water.

- Fence your pool on all four-sides with a barrier that is at least 5 feet high. Move lawn chairs, tables and other potential climbing aids away from the fence to help keep out children.
- Any gate or door leading to the pool area should be self-closing and self-latching, opening outward, with the latch placed on the poolside and out of reach.
- Install panic alarms on all house doors and windows leading to the pool area, automatic door closers and an automatic safety cover over the pool.
- Drain off water that accumulates on top of a pool cover. Completely remove the cover before allowing children in the pool.
- Keep reaching and throwing aids, such as poles and life preservers, on both sides of the pool.
- All non-swimmers should wear approved personal flotation devices (life vests) when they are near water, especially rivers and streams. Air-filled and foam swimming aids such as "water wings" or "noodles" are NOT approved flotation devices.
- Swimming lessons do not insure safety. About 25 per cent of all drowning victims have had swimming lessons. A child who falls into the water unexpectedly will panic and forget his/her swimming skills.
- It is crucial that you and all of your child's caregivers can swim and know how to perform CPR in an emergency. Immediate CPR can prevent death or severe permanent brain damage.

WATER WATCHER tags are free and available in English and Spanish through San Mateo County Health Department's Injury Prevention Program (650) 573-2364.