

How To Stay Swimmingly Safe



By: [Michael Ritter, MD](#) | 02/24/2016

It's always the right time of year to remind Orange County locals and visitors about the importance of preventing drowning and water-related injuries, since so many of us are in the water every day, beachside or poolside. Orange County's water-related injuries are a side effect of the great weather with which we have been blessed, our many swimming pools, the oceanfront that stretches from San Clemente to Seal Beach, and our big surf. With our year-round tourism, drowning isn't just a summer danger.

Drowning is often called "the silent disease." It only takes a few seconds for a child to slip underwater, and it can happen without a sound. Far too many cases of pediatric drowning or near-drowning come into the emergency department as the result of an adult's brief loss of attention.

Call 911 in case of a drowning. If you cannot swim, do not enter the water to try and rescue someone; at swimming pools, look for rescue poles or life preservers mounted poolside. Upon rescue, anyone who has aspirated water in a near-drowning incident should be immediately taken to the nearest emergency department. And if someone has been pulled from the water, it's imperative that a medical examination be performed to assess oxygen flow to the brain and to discover whether any internal injury has occurred.

Taking these basic steps to reduce the chances of drowning are the responsibility of everyone who goes to the beach or swims in the pool:

- Everyone, including young children, should learn how to swim and learn CPR.
- Life vests for less-skilled swimmers is key.
- No one should ever swim alone.
- Bring children to a lifeguard-protected beach or pool; if there is no lifeguard on duty, designate at least one adult observer in your party to act as lifeguard.

Another cause of trips to the emergency department is beach-related traumatic injury. Beachgoers of all ages all-too-frequently injure themselves on the sand before they've even gone into the water: Collisions between pedestrians and boardwalk bicyclists, for example, can result in lacerations, cuts, bruises and even broken bones. Once in the water, surfing and skim boarding can result in unexpected, serious injury. Falling into shallow sand catches people by surprise and can cause spinal cord injury if they fall on their head. Head injury in surfers, resulting from direct contact with the board, is fairly common and could lead to drowning or concussion. So take common sense measures to stay safe:

- Stay aware of your surroundings when walking on slippery, sandy boardwalks, and don't let children dart across bike paths.
- Before going in the water, check with the lifeguard for surf conditions and local rules.
- Wear a leash to keep your surfboard from becoming a hazard to others.
- Don't surf or swim in conditions over your ability level—if in doubt, don't go out.

Be safety-conscious in and around the water and enjoy the aquatic opportunities Orange County has to offer.

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