HEALTH & SAFETY

FAMILY WATER SAFETY GUIDE

Drowning remains a leading cause of preventable injury and death among children and adolescents. Because drowning is quick and often completely silent, understanding situational risks and establishing household safety boundaries saves lives. In accordance with New York State Education Law Section 926 (enacted for the 2026–2027 school year), school districts are mandated to distribute water safety, drowning prevention, and healthy swimming information to families. Below are some resources to assist with this requirement.

Active Supervision: The "Water Watcher" Rule

Never rely on a child's swimming ability, inflatable toys, or lifeguards to keep them safe. Gaps in adult supervision are the primary factor in childhood drowning incidents.

Designate a Water Watcher:

Always assign a specific adult to monitor children in or near water. This person must avoid distractions like texting, reading, using a smartphone, or drinking alcohol. Rotate duties every 15–20 minutes to prevent fatigue. This "Water Watcher's" sole focus is observing swimmers.

Practice Touch Supervision:

For infants, toddlers, and weak swimmers, an adult must be in the water within arm's reach at all times.

Know the Silent Signs of Drowning:

Unlike what we see in movies, a drowning person rarely waves or yells for help.Look for a mouth submerged at water level, head tilted back with mouth open, eyes closed or unfocused, vertical body position with no kicking progress, or absolute silence.

Environment-Specific Water Hazards

Water conditions vary wildly depending on where your family chooses to swim. Always choose designated, lifeguarded areas and assess the environment.

Home & Residential Pools Hazards

Unsecured gates, missing drain grates, chemical imbalances. Must have a 4-sided fence (at least 4 feet high) with self-closing, self-latching gates. Any pool or spa constructed after 12/14/06 must also have a pool alarm to detect entry into the water*. Keep pool toys out of the water area when not in use so children aren't tempted to reach for them.

*https://codes.iccsafe.org/lookup/content-id/17686067

General pool safety information:

- https://dos.ny.gov/pool-safety-information

Lakes, Rivers, & Ponds Hazards

Sudden depth drops, hidden rocks/debris, murky water, cold temperatures.Always test the water depth before entry; never dive headfirst into open water.

Oceans & Coastal Beaches Hazards

Rip currents, heavy surf, tidal shifts, fluctuating water quality.

Emergency Rip Current Action:

If caught in a rip current (a strong channel of water pulling you away from the shore), do not fight it. Swim parallel to the shoreline until you are out of the current, then look to swim back to land at an angle. If you cannot escape, float or tread water and wave for help.

Life Jackets:

Wear properly fitted, U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets around open water like lakes and rivers. Pool toys are not safety devices.

Swim Lessons/Water Competency:

Enroll children in certified, age-appropriate swimming lessons. Ensure your children know baseline survival skills, such as how to step into deep water, return to the surface, float on their back and exit a pool without using a ladder. Formal swim lessons significantly reduce the risk of drowning, especially for young children.

Resources for swimming lessons:

https://cortlandymca.org/

https://www.ymcacny.org/programs/swimming/swim-lessons

https://www.syr.gov/Departments/Parks-Recreation/Learn-to-Swim

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