



Water Safety

Prepared by the Health & Safety Specialists at Child Care Aware® of North Dakota

Containers with just an inch or more of water can be dangerous for a small child. Drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1-4 years of age. It is the second leading cause for children 5-14 years old.

Drowning risks around the home include:

- Bathtubs • Buckets • Toilets • Hot Tubs • Spas • Water Tables • Sinks • Swimming Pools
- Any container large enough to fit a child’s face and deep enough to hold an inch or more of liquid.

Children move quickly, are curious and do not understand their physical abilities. Children between 1 and 4 years old are at greatest risk of drowning because they tend to lose their balance and often cannot pull themselves out of the water. A drowning can occur within a surprisingly short time and is a silent death. A drowning child cannot alert others.

Licensing Rules

- Must obtain written parental permission for water activities, along with a written description of each child’s swimming ability. Permission is not required for water tables or sprinklers.
- Must have an aquatic policy
- All swimming pools (other than wading pools) must be approved yearly by the local health unit
- Wading pools must be strictly supervised, emptied, cleaned, and disinfected daily.

Child Care Water Safety Rules

- NEVER leave a child alone in or near ANY body of water, large or small.
- Anticipate needs and have within arm’s length (phone, towels, tissues, first aid kit, sunscreen, drinks, etc.) DO NOT leave children to get anything!
- Remain alert and watch children with no distractions including activities like reading, sunbathing, etc.
- Be trained in First Aid and CPR and know response for an emergency.
- Remember...Flotation devices are no substitute for constant supervision.
- Be mindful of children with special needs. They may be at higher risk of drowning.
- Be sure to have safe and appropriate staff to child ratios for swimming/wading activities. **A lifeguard is NOT counted as staff.**

Water Safety Supervision Ratios

Caring for Our Children National Performance Standards recommend the following staff to child ratios for swimming and wading activities:

Developmental Level	Recommended Child to Staff Ratio
Infant	1 to 1 Ratio
Toddler	1 to 1 Ratio
Preschool	4 to 1 Ratio
School Age	6 to 1 Ratio

Other Health and Safety Factors:

- Fill portable wading pools prior to use. Drain, clean, and disinfect after use and leave empty (turn upside down) until used again.
- Pools (swimming and wading) and hot tubs contain germs that spread disease and are not recommended, especially for young children who often drink the water. Sprinklers are fun and more sanitary.

- Children with diarrhea or open sores should be excluded from pool use.
- Hot tubs, spas and saunas are unsafe for children- they easily overheat or dehydrate. Do not allow children to use them.
- Sunscreen should be applied before going out; sunhats for infants and toddlers.
- Children need drinking water available outdoors. Snacks before going out.
- Children in diapers should wear diapers designed for swimming/water activities.

Teach Children to:

- Not to go near or into a pool without supervision.
- Not to scream for help unless they mean it.
- Not to run or push on the slippery wet surface around pool.
- Not to swim with anything in their mouths.
- Not to swim in very cold water because it can increase their risk of drowning.
- Not to roughhouse in the water.
- Look out for other children who may be in trouble.
- Go to the bathroom BEFORE getting in the pool.

Tips on Communicating with Parents:

- Obtain written permission for all water activities.
- Have parent complete written permission for sunscreen and insect repellent.
- Always inform parents in plenty of time for needed items (suits, towels, ear plugs).
- Ask parents to volunteer, whenever possible, for water activities.

Liability Recommendations for Providers:

- Consider liability insurance if you do not already have it.
- Make sure your liability insurance covers water activities - on and off the premise.
- Always obtain written permission from parents for water activities on and off the premise.
- Review licensing rules to be sure you are in compliance.
- Have an aquatic policy
- Pools, including large inflatable pools, should be surrounded with fences and safety gates. See American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations http://kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/outdoor/water_safety.html
- Hot tubs should have locked covers.
- Remove all ladders from hot tubs and above the ground pools when not in use. Consider removing other items that could be used in place of a ladder (such as a chair) for a child to access the pool/hot tub.

Parents expect and pay for quality and safety when entrusting their children to others.

NEVER leave a child alone near a body of water!

References:

ND Licensing Rules & Regulations
Caring for Our Children, 4th Edition, 2019
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

CDC

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