



Water Safety

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

More children ages 1-4 die from drowning than any other cause of death. Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children ages 5-14. Every year in the United States there are over 4,000 unintentional drowning deaths. Most child drownings occur in pools and bathtubs.

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 & 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, sunscreen, drinks, etc.) DO NOT leave children to get anything!
- Remain alert and watch children with no distractions (such as reading, sunbathing, visiting, etc.)
- Be trained in First Aid and CPR and know how to respond in an emergency.
- Always have a first aid kit easily accessible.
- Swim noodles, water wings, inflatable rings, and other "floaties" are not certified safety devices and should never be used as a substitute for adult supervision or a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket.
- 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 & Safety Factors:

- Fill portable wading pools with water that is safe to drink in case children drink/swallow the water.
- Water in pools, hot tubs, and splash pads/water playgrounds/spray pads can contain germs that can make children sick if they drink/swallow the water.
- Place wading pools and sprinklers on grass instead of concrete to provide a more protective surface in case they fall/slip.
- Children with diarrhea or open sores should be excluded from water play.
- Hot Tubs, spas, and saunas are unsafe for children; they easily overheat or dehydrate. Do not allow children to use.
- Sunscreen should be applied before going out. Sunscreen is recommended to be reapplied every 2 hours. Reapply more frequently if swimming/getting wet.
- Provide children with drinking water outdoors.
- Children in diapers should wear diapers designed for swimming/water activities. Diapers should be checked frequently (about every hour) and changed when soiled.
- Provide frequent bathroom breaks for children who are toilet trained.
- If using a Slip N Slide, it is recommended to place slide on a flat surface of grass free of rocks, roots, etc.; provide a large area of clear space at the start and end of slide as well as along the sides; allow only one child to go on the slide at a time; no sliding headfirst.

Splash Pads:

- According to the CPSC, 83% of splash pad injuries involve falls, with the most being bruises, cuts/scrapes, arm/hand fractures, and head injuries.
- Unlike traditional pools, many splash pads are not monitored/tested or required to maintain continuous chemical treatment. Inadequate filtration or disinfection can allow germs and illnesses to spread.
- Watch the water pressure – stop play if spray hits children’s faces too hard or water pressure feels too strong.
- Do not allow the children to sit, stand, or put their mouths over the jets/sprays.

Teach Children To:

- Not to go near or into a pool without supervision.
- Not to drink the water for water play (pools, splash pads/parks, sensory tables, etc.).
- Not to scream for help unless they mean it.
- Not to run or push on the slippery wet surface around the pool or on splash pads.
- Not to swim with anything in their mouths.
- Not to wrestle in the water.
- Look out for other children who may be in trouble.
- Go to the bathroom BEFORE getting into the pool and not pee or poop 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, sunscreen, swim diapers, etc.).
- Ask parents to volunteer, whenever possible, for water activities for extra supervision.

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 premises.
- Always obtain written permission from parents for water activities on and off the premises.
- 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. It is recommended for fences to be at least 4 feet high.
- Hot tubs should have locked covers.
- Remove all ladders/steps from hot tubs and above the ground pools when not in use.

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

NEVER, NEVER leave a child alone near or in a body of water!

References:

ND Licensing Rules and Regulations
CDC
Caring for Our Children, 4th Edition
CPSC