

This factsheet presents background information mainly for people working with children and families, and students undertaking projects.

Child Accident Prevention Trust publishes a range of resources for parents, carers and older children, containing comprehensive safety advice. A complete list of these resources – leaflets, booklets, posters, guides, etc – can be found at [www.capt.org.uk](http://www.capt.org.uk) together with details of how to obtain them.

## How many unintentional drownings happen each year?

In 2005 in the UK

- 26 children under fifteen years old were drowned (England and Wales: 24, Scotland: 0, Northern Ireland: 2)
- 3 of these children were under one year, 12 between one and four years, 3 were between five and nine, and 8 were ten to fourteen years old.

The places where these accidents happen reflect children's developmental stages and where they spend their time.

- In the younger age group the most common place where children are drowned is in the home or garden. Of the children under five who drowned, 5 of them did so in the bath.
- Older children are more likely to drown while playing outside the home.

As well as these fatalities many near drownings occur each year. In 2005/6 in England and Wales, about 150 children under 15 years were taken to hospital after nearly drowning. Not surprisingly most unintentional drownings happen in the summer months.

Near drowning can have long-term consequences, resulting in permanent disability and serious health problems. The longer a child is immersed in water with loss of consciousness and breathing the more likely is it that such long-term consequences will arise.

## What can be done to reduce the number of drownings?

It is important to be aware that a baby can drown in as little as 5 cm (2 in) of water. This means that anywhere that water can collect can become a hazard. The following actions can help reduce the risk:

- fit a strong cover, such as a heavy metal grid, over the garden pond or fill it in. Ponds can make excellent sandpits for young children
- have fencing around pools with self-locking gates that children cannot open or climb
- empty paddling pools after use and either cover or turn them over
- check regularly in the garden for anything that could collect water – put buckets, wheelbarrows or any other containers away or turn them upside down
- be sure that toddlers cannot get into neighbours gardens – they may have a pond, pool or other hazard
- always supervise children closely when playing in or near water such as paddling pools, at the beach, in parks and gardens
- When on holiday with children check out the environment for any water hazards, such as unfenced ponds or pools, rivers or canals
- **never** leave a baby or child under 6 years old in the bath without an adult to supervise them

As children develop it is important that they learn about water safety.

- encourage safe water play with young children
- make sure children learn to swim – all schools should be teaching swimming to children between five and fifteen years old
- encourage children to swim in safe places such as public pools where there are trained lifeguards
- teach children the meaning of warning flags or signs at beaches and other bodies of water
- explain to children why they should never swim in areas such as canals, weirs or quarries
- learn basic first aid techniques and encourage older children to do the same

#### Further information and advice

Royal Life Saving Society  
River House  
High Street  
Broom  
B50 4HN

tel 01789 773994

[www.lifesavers.org.uk](http://www.lifesavers.org.uk)

RoSPA  
Edgbaston Park  
353 Bristol Road  
Birmingham  
B5 7ST

tel: 0121 248 2000

[www.rospa.com](http://www.rospa.com)

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority have a useful water safety website for teachers and children – see [www.nc.uk.net/safeswimming/](http://www.nc.uk.net/safeswimming/) for details.

Local swimming pools or leisure centres may have additional information on swimming classes.

For information on other child safety topics see capt's website at [www.capt.org.uk](http://www.capt.org.uk) or write to us at the address below.

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