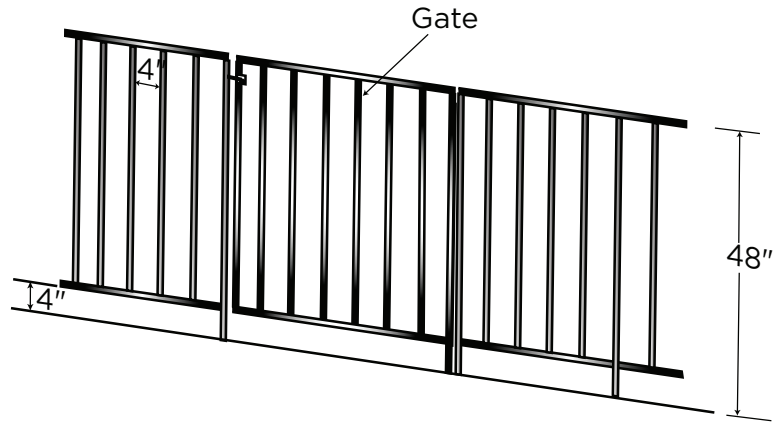


Swimming Pool Safety

Every year, hundreds of children drown in residential swimming pools. In addition, there are thousands of children that suffer near drowning. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has a strategic goal to reduce the rate of drowning of children under age 5 by ten percent over the next ten years.

The statistics show that drowning and near drowning of children in residential pools is happening at an alarming rate. As you will see, there is a common theme to these accidents: Most of the drownings and near drownings happened while the child was being supervised by one or both parents; 69 percent of the children were not expected to be in or near the pool, but were found drowned or submerged in the water; 77 percent of the accident victims had been missing for five minutes or less when they were found in the pool.



Here is what we can learn from these statistics

- Young children and toddlers move faster than you think. Drowning and near drowning can happen in an instant.
- Swimming pool drownings are silent. You won't hear a call for help.
- These accidents are preventable.

Barriers

The consensus among experts is that the best way to improve these statistics is through construction and maintenance of effective barriers to prevent access to the pool area. Look carefully at the barrier around the pool. The barrier should be continuous around the pool. Shrubs are not an acceptable barrier. The barrier should prevent a child from climbing over, crawling under or passing through. Here are a few things to consider:

Door From House to Pool Area

Where the wall of the house makes up part of the barrier, there is usually a door that leads from the house directly into the pool area. This door should have an alarm that sounds immediately when the door is opened. Typically the alarm is set up with a bypass switch or keypad that is located out of reach of children. The bypass switch deactivates the alarm for a single opening of the door and then resets.

Gates

The gate to the pool area should be self closing and self latching and should have a locking mechanism. The latch should be located out of reach of children. In addition, the gate should open out from the pool area so that a toddler leaning on an 'almost latched' gate will close the gate.

Barrier Height

The barrier (fence) should be at least 48 inches high. Look for anything that could negate the height of the barrier such as a bench, storage bin or tree next to the barrier. The barrier should come to within 4 inches of the ground in all areas otherwise a child could squeeze under. The design of your barrier may make it easy to climb. For example, the standard chain link fence is too easy to climb. There are guidelines available for this (see references below).

Vertical Members

Vertical members of a fence should be spaced close enough together to prevent a child from squeezing through. Four inches is the maximum opening size.

Pool Safety Covers

A power safety cover can be used to increase the safety of the pool. When in place, these covers will prevent kids from falling into an unattended pool. These are not standard pool covers. They are designed specifically for this purpose.

Educate Yourself

The suggestions above will simply stack the odds in your favor. There is no question that close supervision of your children is the most important consideration. Educate all people involved with caring for your children about the dangers. Learn cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

This document is based on information collected from the Consumer Product and Safety Commission.

References

- CPSC publication No 359 – How to plan for the unexpected
- CPSC publication No 362 – Safety Barrier Guidelines for Home Pools
- CPSC news release - #04-165, June 21, 2004. Public Hearing in Tampa Florida on Swimming Pool Safety.

