

Article printed from Lifesaving Resources, Inc. - Aquatic Safety & Water Rescue Experts

# Bathtub Drownings: Beware of the Hazards and Risks to Young Children

Posted in [Issues In Safety & Rescue](#) by [Gerald M. Dworkin](#)

Drowning is generally defined as “an asphyxia death in which the body is deprived of oxygen as a result of impairment of oxygen exchange ultimately within the lungs after partial or complete submersion in a liquid, usually water, with subsequent inhalation of some quantity of the liquid deep into the airways of the lungs.”<sup>1</sup> However, there is no one definitive test or autopsy finding that can absolutely unequivocally define drowning.

Drowning, especially in young children, is a significant health concern within the U.S. Young children are attracted to water, and toddlers are inquisitive and impulsive and lack a realistic sense of danger. Of the child drownings occurring in and around the house, nearly half of the victims had been out of sight for less than five minutes prior to the incident, and most of the victims were being supervised by one or both parents.

Unlike what we see in the movies, drowning is a silent death. Children do not scream and call for help. They simply slip or slide down into the water, and most young children lack the core strength necessary to lift their head out of the water.

Within the United States, drowning is the 3rd leading cause of unintentional injury death for people of all ages, and the 2nd leading cause of unintentional injury death for children under the age of 14. It is the 3rd leading cause of death from all causes for children 0 – 4 years of age.

A child can drown in a matter of minutes. It happens quickly and silently, which is why the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Centers for Disease Control, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, among others, advocates the need for constant supervision of young children, especially while they are in or around the water. However, many parents are not aware of this which is why of the child drownings that occur within the home, approximately 2/3 of them occur in the bath and sometimes in as little as two inches of water.

The common statement from distraught parents after one of these tragic incidents was, “but I was only gone for a moment.” But, that’s all it takes for a possible tragedy. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, “no product can replace adult supervision.” And, without supervision, drowning can happen quickly when a child slips or slides in the soapy water or goes after a toy in the water. When is it safe to allow a child to bathe alone? Some experts say age 4, while others insist a mature 6-year-old may be ready according to a spokeswoman for the American Academy of Pediatrics. And, because of the risk of drowning, young children should never be left in the care of an older sibling while in the bathtub.

One of the reasons young children slip, slide or fall into water and drown in as little as two (2) inches is the Big Head – Little Body Syndrome. According to Dr. Heather Felton, a University of Louisville pediatrician and spokeswoman for the American Academy of Pediatrics, “they are called toddlers for a reason – they fall over. Young children may not have the core strength to get their faces back out of the water or they panic.”

A child may also be seriously injured when attempting to stand in the bathtub. The bathtub is a four-sided vessel with faucets protruding from one side. Should a child slip and fall while in the tub, he can sustain serious head and/or cervical spine trauma as a result.

Again, this is why the aquatics industry advocates the need to constantly supervise your children when in or around the water. Children should not be left alone for even a second. The majority of bathtub drowning deaths occurred when there was an interruption to the bathing routine, such as the doorbell or phone ringing while the parent is bathing the child.

According to the CPSC, of the reported fatalities, 28 percent involved a lapse in supervision, such as when the parent or caregiver left the bathroom while the child was in the bathtub to answer the phone or door, or to retrieve a towel. In 23 percent of the incidents, the child was left with another child.

In order to prevent drownings in the home, the CPSC safety tips include:

- Never leave young children alone near any water or tubs or basins with fluids. Young children can drown in even small amounts of liquid.
- Always keep a young child within arm's reach in a bathtub. If you must leave, take the child with you.
- Don't leave a young child in a bathtub under the care of another child.
- Learn CPR. In summary, there is a huge incidence of young children drowning in bathtubs within the U.S. Most parents lack the knowledge and realization of the hazards, risks, and dangers associated with leaving an unsupervised child in a bathtub, and many believe their child is safe if accompanied by another and older sibling while in the bathtub.



[Print Article](#)

[Share](#)

- 
- 
- 

[Print page](#)