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Kids



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Stay swim safe

Get cautious – Prathima Ananth Narayan speaks to the experts at Hamilton Aquatics to find out everything you need to know about keeping the kids safe when they go for a dip

By Prathima Ananth Narayan December 27, 2011

For families in Dubai, beaches and swimming pools sit right at the top of the list of hang-out spots. Summer or winter, splashing around is both light on the pockets and keeps the kids occupied for hours. But as with any other activity involving the kids, safety comes first, and unfortunately over the past year there has been a rise in the number of swimming accidents in Dubai. Are we not taking enough safety precautions or have we just become too blasé about the risks?

To find out more, *Time Out Kids* spoke to the experts at Hamilton Aquatics to discover what steps we can take to ensure our kids stay safe around Dubai's swimming pools and beaches.

The first thing Will Jones, Hamilton Aquatics RLSS Trainer & Assessor, tells us is that kids should NEVER be left unattended. There should always be a supervising adult who needs to be vigilant and within reaching distance, particularly if they're in charge of a weak swimmer. Will reminds us that lifeguards need to meet international standards and also possess suitable lifeguard equipment. The lack of panic alarms, procedures and standard rules for pool safety and usage are too easily overlooked by parents and guardians, but it's the small things like these that can be a major factor in our approach to potential accidents.

According to Dubai Police figures, in 2010 more than 70 per cent of the drowning incidents registered involved children. Pools in buildings and villas are especially dangerous because they lack any kind of supervision. Pools in residential buildings, hotels, offices and parks are monitored by the Dubai Municipality and the department's regulations state that a certified lifeguard must be present when a pool is occupied and safety equipment such as first aid kits and flotation devices must be available at all times. Even so, it pays to be vigilant. Last year, a national newspaper reported that many public pools are not properly manned, with many 'lifeguards' not possessing the correct qualifications, and even more worrying, some not even being able to swim themselves.

There are also other unseen dangers that can lurk around swimming pools, including the actual pool steps and filters. Children can injure themselves on concealed steps, or can easily get their fingers trapped in the filters if they're not monitored or warned in advance.

Beaches have a few looming dangers as well. We always need to watch out for tides and currents – kids or no kids – but sudden changes in depth and the use of inflatables (which could end up floating out too far without even realising) are hazards that could catch a kid by surprise, cause panic and result in an accident.

Far too often, supervising adults don't know how to recognise that a child is in distress in the water. What you need to look out for is the Instinctive Drowning Response (IDR) – behaviour that a drowning person exhibits. Will says, 'It's important to remember that most drownings will be silent as they're busy

gasping for air and cannot scream.' A drowning person may not always thrash around and call for help. Such a response is called 'aquatic distress' and if it occurs then it's usually right before the IDR.

Even with all the preventive measures, unfortunately accidents still happen, so, it's important to know what to do. If you think you see a child drowning, call 911 immediately and alert the lifeguard, if one is nearby.

Chances are you might be alone, and in that case the first thing to do is get the child out of water (for example, use a floatation device tied to a rope or approach the child from behind, grab them around from under the arms, and tow them to shore or to a boat). Check for breathing immediately and if the child is not breathing, check the pulse. Begin CPR if you are fully trained, alternatively, seek immediate medical assistance. Water in the lungs can still kill a child over the next few hours, so even if the child is breathing, it is absolutely necessary to seek medical care as soon as possible.

Basic first aid courses for parents and guardians are a very wise investment, and you can always share what you've learnt with other parents and even your kids. Before you make a visit to the beach or pool, set rules and remind your children about what they should and should not do. If children see the restricted areas of the beach as a challenge, make sure they know that no challenge is worth their life!

It's never too early to get the kids enrolled in swimming lessons (Hamilton Aquatics teach kids from just three months) but if a parent or guardian isn't strong in the water, it's definitely worth looking into adult classes too. As well as the obvious health benefits, Will rightly states, 'It's a life skill that could one day save your life or someone else's.'

For more info on Hamilton Aquatic's lessons for kids and grown-ups, visit www.hamiltonaquatics.ae. For first aid courses, visit www.backtobasicsuae.com.

Instinctive Drowning Response

Essential signs to watch out for:

- The mouth sinks below and rises above the water level.