

Death After Swimming Is Extremely Rare - And Is NOT "Dry Drowning"

Emergency Physicians Seek To Calm Parents' Fears



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American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) →

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WASHINGTON, July 11, 2017 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Several recent news stories about the tragic deaths of children using incorrect terms, such as "dry drowning," "delayed drowning," or "secondary drowning," have prompted the nation's emergency physicians to reassure parents who might be alarmed if their child develops a cough after swimming or spending time in the water.

"Parents are being unduly alarmed by media reports suggesting that children can die from drowning a week after swimming," said Rebecca Parker, MD, FACEP, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. "Some children can experience complications from swimming. For example, it is possible for a child to inhale water and develop an infection, such as pneumonia, which can become very serious and cause breathing problems. If a child has breathing problems at any time, the parent should take him or her to the emergency department. But there are no cases of completely normal, asymptomatic patients who suddenly die because they went swimming a few days ago. It's also time to retire those incorrect terms, because it is inaccurate and incorrect to say a child was initially fine after a water event and then "dry drowned" a day or week later."

There are no medically accepted conditions known as "near-drowning," "dry drowning," and "secondary drowning." The World Health Organization, the International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation, the Wilderness Medical Society, the International Lifesaving Federation, the



International Conference on Drowning, the American Heart Association, the American Red Cross, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) all discourage the use of these terms. These terms are often used instead of the proper term which would be drowning. Drowning is a process, with a spectrum of effects ranging from mild to severe with fatal and nonfatal outcomes.

Dr. Parker added that you should take your child to the nearest emergency department if they develop respiratory problems or other symptoms of a medical emergency at any time, for any reason.

Every day, about 10 people die from drowning, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It ranks as the fifth leading cause of unintentional injury death in the United States.

Several factors can contribute to a person drowning and obviously not all of them can be controlled. However, here are some tips for keeping children and adults as safe as possible when near or in the water.

- Supervise Young Children – They must be watched at all times when near water. It can involve very little water and take only a matter of seconds for a child to accidentally drown when an adult turns away.
- Learn to Swim – Formal swimming lessons can help prevent all people, but especially young children, from drowning.
- Learn CPR – It can take paramedics several minutes to arrive. Having CPR skills can mean the difference between life and death or permanent brain damage.
- Use the "Buddy System" – Always swim with a buddy, and only swim in areas that have lifeguards on duty, if possible.
- Avoid Alcohol – Drinking alcohol while on a boat or swimming in the water can severely impair a person's judgment. Never consume alcohol while supervising children around water.
- Use Life Jackets – When on a boat, make sure the number of (Coast Guard-approved) life jackets matches the number of passengers and that they are easily accessible. Young children should have a life jacket on at all times when on a boat or in the water. According to the CDC, potentially half of all boating deaths might be prevented by the use of life jackets.
- Do not Use Air-Filled or Foam Toys As Safety Devices – These toys are not substitutes for life jackets and are not designed to keep swimmers safe.
- Know Weather Conditions – If strong winds or heavy thunderstorms and lightning are rolling in, get out of the water and seek shelter immediately.
- Be Aware of Waves and Rip Currents – If on the beach, watch for dangerous waves and rip currents. If caught in a rip current, swim parallel to shore. Once free of the current, swim toward the shore.

ACEP is the national medical specialty society representing emergency medicine. ACEP is committed to advancing emergency care through continuing education, research and public education. Headquartered in Dallas, Texas, ACEP has 53 chapters representing each state, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. A Government Services Chapter represents emergency physicians employed by military branches and other government agencies.

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