



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Montgomery County
Public Health District

Mark E. Escott, MD, MPH, FACEP
Public Health Authority

Dr. Escott's Medical Minute May is Drowning Prevention Month

Almost 4,000 adults and children die every year in the United States as a result of drowning. One-fifth of them are children under the age of 14 and for every one that dies, there are five times as many that are treated in Emergency Departments. Montgomery County faces numerous deaths every year from drowning in lakes, ponds, pools, and bath tubs. For children aged 1-4, drowning in the back yard swimming pool is the second leading cause of death. The good news is that there are identified risk factors and strategies to help prevent these strategies.

RISK FACTORS:

- Inability to swim
- Lack of barriers to bodies of water, primarily backyard pools
- Lack of close supervision
- Not wearing life jackets
- Alcohol use
- Seizure disorder

METHODS TO REDUCE RISK:

One of the most important ways to decrease the risk of drowning, particularly in children aged 1-4, is by teaching them how to swim or how to respond if they fall into water. In addition to this, one of the best ways to prevent accidental falls into backyard pools is the installation of barrier fencing around the pool. Every year, Montgomery County experiences deaths associated with accidental falls into pools and bathtubs that may have been prevented by a closed bathroom door or closed gate to a pool.

If you are unable to install fencing around backyard pools or ponds, you must make sure to always monitor children closely while they are in or near bodies of water, including bath tubs. It only takes seconds for a child to fall in and drown. Every year when MCHD responds to these emergencies they often hear...."I only stepped away for a minute..." You must be vigilant!

Drowning prevention methods can also prevent deaths while boating and should be used at all times. Many boating related cases are due to intoxication where boaters are knocked unconscious and fall into the water. To prevent these deaths, it is important to avoid intoxication while boating, swimming, or while supervising children in the water. The CDC estimates that one half of all boating related drowning might have been prevented with life jackets...HALF! Use life jackets while boating or in or around bodies of water EVERY SINGLE TIME!



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Other important methods of prevention:

- Never swim alone
 - Particularly if there is a history of seizures or other serious medical condition
- Do not allow children to have breath holding contests
 - Even a brief episode of “passing out” may be deadly
- Learn CPR
 - Despite vigilance, sometimes tragedy happens...know what to do if it does!
 - MCHD provides regular CPR classes to the community, please go to:
<http://www.mchd-tx.org/cpr-classes/>

Drowning is a serious cause of death in Montgomery County and every year we have episodes throughout the county which can be prevented. MCHD and MCPHD will be participating in numerous drowning prevention initiatives this month, so please check us out on Facebook or our website at www.mchd-tx.org. For information on swimming lessons, contact your local YMCA at www.ymcahouston.org or other organizations for scheduled classes.