



WATER SAFETY

Summer is the perfect time to relax, visit local Maltese beaches, take part in water sports and relax by the pool. As we enjoy our time at the beach, injuries are often not the first thing on our minds. Yet, according to the World Health Organisation, more than 500 000 deaths each year are due to unintentional drowning. (Szpilman, Bierens, Handley and Orłowski, 2012). Children aged 1-4 are at the highest risk of drowning. Drowning is often silent and may happen within seconds. Thankfully, parents and caregivers may play a key role in the prevention of drowning.

The following include numerous strategies which may reduce the risk of drowning:

1. Swimming Lessons

Formal Swimming lessons should be considered to be a valuable life skill. Children should still be supervised even if they have already been taught how to swim. Learning how to swim is also fun and may help ensure that children are exercising regularly.

2. Safety at the Pool Site

The introduction of a gate separating the pool from the rest of the outdoor space may prevent the child from accidentally falling into the pool. Fences should be at least 1.2 meters high. They should surround the pool. It is of utmost importance that this fence is not easy to climb and lack any footholds or handholds. The gate should be made of material that is easy to see through. It must be self-closing, self-latching and should open outwards. One might consider using weighted pool covers and pool alarms. These measures however should not replace adult supervision or the presence of a gate. (Blazovic, Jamal and Quinn, 2021).

3. Supervision is a must

A responsible adult should always be present when children are close to water (including at bath-time!). Adults should avoid distractions such as using their phones, reading or any activity that might cause the adult to lose sight of the children. For beginner swimmers, "touch supervision" is considered to be an adequate level of supervision. This form of supervision implies that the supervisor is within arm's reach. (Denny et al., 2021)

4. Life Jackets

Life Jackets and floats should be used by individuals of all ages during boating activities. Inflatable armbands should not replace floatation devices as these can easily deflate. (Blazovic, Jamal and Quinn, 2021)

5. CPR courses

The ability to perform CPR following an ABC (Airways, Breathing, Compressions) approach is extremely important. It can be life-saving and make all the difference.

If the person is rescued at any time, the process of drowning is interrupted, which is termed as nonfatal drowning. It is essential to call for emergency services for immediate resuscitation after a person is rescued from the shore.

It is of utmost importance that the rescuer does not endanger himself whilst rescuing someone else. Safe rescue techniques include using a pole, tree branch or throwing a buoyant object. These are safe and quick responses that are often neglected. (Szpilman, Bierens, Handley and Orłowski, 2012)

6. Check the Weather Forecast

Always check the weather forecast prior to visiting the beach. Avoid the beach or using your boat if strong winds are present. Avoid currents and dangers such as rocks and slippery vegetation. If however, you do get caught in a strong current, swim parallel to the current until you have passed through it. Do not try to swim against it! (Swim Area Safety, 2021)

7. Say NO to Substance Abuse

One should never swim or use a boat under the influence of drugs, sedatives or alcohol. Avoid alcoholic beverages when supervising children at the beach. Alcohol and certain drugs may impair one's judgement, balance and co-ordination. Examples of medications that must be avoided include sedating drugs such as benzodiazepines which are often used for anxiety. (Prevention | Drowning Prevention | CDC, 2021)

8. Buddy System

A Buddy system is helpful when those who are going swimming suffer from illnesses such as epilepsy, ASD or cardiac arrhythmias which may increase their risk of drowning. (Prevention | Drowning Prevention | CDC, 2021)

9. Look out for safety signs and warning flags including shallow water signs

One must never dive head first into shallow waters as this might result in permanent spinal or head injury. Caregivers should always advise children not to run on a pool deck and avoid diving in areas where the depth of the water is unknown.

10. Water Depth

Depths approaching chin height may pose a risk to those who have not learned to support themselves whilst swimming. Those lacking skill drown quickly and silently after entering deep water.

11. Avoid Underwater Hazards

Diving into unknown waters is very dangerous. Always choose a designated swim area which has clear waters. Murky water may make it difficult to find someone who is submerged in the water.

12. Caution when using boats

Boats may provide access to open waters and snorkeling sites. This however may be a cause of safety concern. Ensure that engines are off before entering the water in order to prevent the circulation of dangerous carbon monoxide. Everyone on board a boat must wear a life jacket.

13. Cleaning pools

In addition to drowning, the water may also be a source of infection. Small inflatable pools should be emptied at least daily in order to help prevent the spread of germs. After emptying the pool, it is also important to remove any debris, rinse off any dirt with fresh water and allow the pool to air dry.

With respect to swimming pools, test strips should be used to ensure the water has an appropriate amount of chlorine and pH. Chlorine is used to kill off any dangerous germs that may be present in pools. (Inflatable and Plastic Kiddie Pools | Healthy Swimming | Healthy Water | CDC, 2021)

Bibliography

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