Safety Tip of the Month:
Staying Safe in the Water

Splashing, wading, and paddling - it must mean a great day in the water. Playing at the beach, at a water park, by a lake or in a pool can be a real treat on a hot day. But water can also mean danger, especially for kids who don't know how to stay safe.

Why Is It Important to Be Safe in the Water?
Fish are able to live and breathe under water, but people need air to breathe. People drown when too much water gets into their lungs. When that happens, the lungs can't carry enough oxygen to the brain and the rest of the body.

Drowning is the second most common cause of death from injuries among kids under the age of 14. Drowning can happen so fast - sometimes in less than 2 minutes after your head goes under the water - that often there's very little time for someone to help. Many drownings and near drownings occur when a kid accidentally falls into a swimming pool. But accidents can happen anywhere - at someone's home or even at your own house, and that's why you need to know how to be safe around water:

Swimming Pools
Pools are awesome! What could be better than a dip in the pool and fun in the sun? But remember a pool's sides and bottom are usually made of concrete, a rock-hard material. A slip or fall could be painful and dangerous.

Have you seen those big numbers painted on the side of the pool? Those are called depth markers - they tell you how deep the water is at that point.

You should always look before you jump into a pool. You should also only dive off the diving board. Never dive off the side of the pool unless an adult says that the water is deep enough. The water may be shallower than you think. If you hit the bottom . . . ouch! You might get knocked out or you could hurt your neck very badly.

Test the pool's water temperature before you plunge in. Cold water can shock your body and make your blood pressure and heart rate go up. You might accidentally open your mouth to yell and accidentally breathe in some water. Cold water can also slow your muscles, making it hard to swim.

Here's some other good advice for the pool:

1. Always have an adult watch you when you are in the pool - even in your own backyard. Never go in the pool if there is no adult around.

2. Gates are around pools for a reason - to keep kids away from the water when there isn't a lifeguard or adult around to watch them. Never go through any pool gates when they are closed. Stay safe and stay out!
3. Always obey pool rules.
4. Swim with a buddy.
5. If you're learning to swim, check flotation devices to make sure they are Coast Guard approved.
6. Walk slowly in the pool area. Don't run.
7. Swim at a depth that is safe for you. If you're just learning to swim, stay in the shallow end.
8. Don't push or jump on others. You could accidentally hurt someone or yourself.
9. Toys to help you float come in many shapes and sizes (an inner tube, air mattress or beach ball, for example). Although they are fun and can help you while you learn to swim, what they can't do is save a life. They're toys that can lose air or float away.
10. Don't chew gum or eat while you swim - you could choke.

Lakes and Ponds
Lots of kids swim in streams, lakes or ponds. But even though these places are beautiful, they can be dangerous:

1. Often you can't see the bottom of a lake or pond. It may be shallow on the edge and then suddenly drop off. So never swim without adult supervision.
2. Although the fish swimming around won't hurt you, some ponds and lakes may hide jagged rocks, broken bottles or trash. Wear something to protect your feet.
3. Watch out for weeds and grass, which can trap even a good swimmer. If you panic and try to yank yourself free, you may get even more tangled. Instead, shake and pull your arms and legs slowly to work yourself loose or call for an adult's help.
4. If you're going out on a boat, **always** wear a life jacket (and have an adult make sure it is Coast Guard approved). Even if you are a good swimmer, something could cause the boat to tip over and you could be trapped underneath.

Beaches
It's hard to resist a day on the beach. Who wouldn't want to splash in the waves or build a huge sand castle? But even though it looks calm and peaceful, the ocean can be dangerous. Here are some tips to keep in mind when swimming at the beach:

1. Never underestimate the power of the ocean. It isn't like a swimming pool. The ocean is so large that it's harder to spot you if you get in trouble. When you first get to the beach, check with the lifeguard to find out how strong the waves are.
2. In some places swimmers may encounter strong undertows or ocean currents. Rip currents are so strong that they can carry swimmers away from shore before they know what's going on. If you are caught in a current, swim parallel to the shore

(alongside the shore) rather than to the shore until the water stops pulling you, then swim back to shore. If you can't get back to the beach, tread water and wave for a lifeguard's help.

3. You probably won't see any sharks (although a friendly dolphin may splash by) where you are swimming, but jellyfish and Portuguese man-o-wars are another story. These umbrella-shaped, nearly clear animals can grow to be as large as several feet in diameter! They are often found floating near the shore. Getting stung is no fun - it can hurt and blister your skin. If you get stung, tell an adult as soon as possible.

Here's some other good advice for the beach:

1. Never swim alone!
2. Always swim where a lifeguard can see you and in areas that are marked for swimmers to use.
3. Wear protective footwear, especially on rocky beaches.
4. Don't swim out too far.
5. Never fake trouble or calls for help.
6. Don't swim close to piers. If the water moves suddenly, you could hit a piling or a rock.
7. Store drinks in plastic containers at the beach - broken glass bottles and bare feet don't mix.
8. Don't turn your back to the ocean - you may be swept into the water by waves that come without warning.

Water Parks

You're riding down that water park ride with the spray in your face and you're having a great time, but there are things to think about, too. Water park safety is an important part of having fun. Some parks have wave pools that can be pretty rough and you may get in over your head. Ask the lifeguard on duty or read the signs to see how high the waves get. Don't swim out too far, and be sure to get out of the water if the waves get too high or if you are knocked over.

Here are other water park safety tips:

1. If you don't know how to swim or are not a strong swimmer, make sure you wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.
2. Read all of the signs before going on a ride. Make sure you are tall enough, old enough and don't have any of the medical conditions that might make the ride dangerous. If you have questions, ask the lifeguard.
3. Always make sure there's a lifeguard at each ride and listen to his or her instructions. Wait until the rider ahead of you has passed a safe point for you to go down the slide.

4. Always go down the water slide face up and feet first. This is the safe and correct way to ride.
5. When you go from ride to ride, don't run - it's slippery! Also, remember that each ride is different. Read each sign and note how deep the water is in the pool.

But I Know How to Swim!

It's important to know your limits when it comes to playing in the water. You could develop a cramp (where a muscle in your body suddenly tenses up and causes pain) or other physical problem that makes it hard to swim. If you get a cramp, get out of the water for a while and give your muscles a rest.

Waves can knock you down or push you to the ocean floor. Stay close to an adult or get out of the water when the waves get rough.

People also get into trouble when they start to panic or become too tired to swim. Know your limits and respect the water.

Here are some other good water safety tips:

1. Learn to swim. Ask your parents to contact your local American Red Cross or community center for information on boating or water safety courses.
2. Always put on plenty of sunscreen before you go outside. It's also a good idea to wear sunglasses and a hat to protect your skin from the sun's harmful rays.
3. Non-swimmers should stick to water no deeper than their shoulders.
4. Stop swimming or boating as soon as you see or hear a storm. Remember lightning is electricity - electricity and water are a dangerous combination.
5. Don't swim in the dark.

Source: **Kids Health at www.kidshealth.com.**