



Protecting Our Children

Water Safety Sense

(NAPSA)—Although drowning is a major cause of injury and death for children ages 5 to 14, it can be prevented. One way is through the YMCA's Safety Around Water program, which teaches kids the value of being safe around water and parents the importance of water safety skills. According to data from the USA Swimming Foundation, 70 percent of African-American, 60 percent of Hispanic and 40 percent of Caucasian children cannot swim. To reduce such statistics, the Y—one of the nation's leading nonprofits strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility—will award more than 18,000 scholarships for free swim lessons to children in high-risk communities.

Why The Y

The Y was the first organization to introduce the concept of group swim lessons in 1909. Now, in thousands of pools across the country, the organization teaches more than a million children from all backgrounds invaluable water safety and swim skills. They learn how to reach the water's surface if they submerge, safely reach a pool's edge, exit any body of water and respond to unexpected water situations.

Water Safety Suggestions

If you know how to stay safe in and around water, swimming can be a lifelong source of fun and exercise.

Here are six steps toward water safety:

1. Never swim alone. Swim only where there's a lifeguard on duty.

2. Supervise children whenever they're in water. Whether they're in the bath or the ocean, stay within arm's reach at all times.

3. Don't hold your breath. Children shouldn't hold their breath for a long time while swimming. This can cause drowning and other severe physical side effects.

4. Wear a life jacket. Inexperienced or nonswimmers should wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.

5. Don't jump in the water to save someone struggling in deep water. Even if you're a great swimmer, a panicked person can overpower you and pull you underwater. The Y's Safety Around Water program teaches the "reach, throw, don't go" concept of using a long object to reach for the swimmer and pull him or her to safety.



A Safety Around Water program can bridge the cultural and access gaps that may prevent some children from learning important water safety skills.

6. Enroll in water safety lessons. Just like teaching children to look both ways before crossing the street, having them participate in formal water safety lessons gives them an important life skill. The Y's Safety Around Water program teaches children fundamental water safety skills and what to do if they find themselves in water unexpectedly.

"Every year, the Y teaches more than 1 million children from all backgrounds invaluable water safety and swim skills. This year, we're committed to addressing the disturbing statistics around fatal youth drownings by making free swim lessons available to more than 18,000 children in underserved communities," said Kevin Washington, President and CEO of Y-USA. "It's our mission to help mitigate the sociocultural factors that inhibit today's youth—especially those of color in urban communities—from receiving the potentially lifesaving skills to keep them safe in and around water."

One problem the program aims to solve is the number of things that inhibit African-American kids from learning how to swim and swimming recreationally or competitively. Things that put them at high risk for drowning include:

- **Lack of Swimming Access**—convenient facilities may be few and far between, expensive and hard to get to.

- **Cultural Constraints**—there may be a legacy of fear.

- **Parental Perceptions**—adults who don't swim themselves may not realize what needs to be done so their children can learn the skill.

Learn More

Families interested in finding out more about Safety Around Water and in enrolling a child in swimming and water safety classes should visit www.ymca.net/watersafety.