Swimming Pool Safety

Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional death for children ages 1-17 years old in Georgia.\(^1\) There were 30 drowning deaths among children in that age group in 2018.\(^2\) There were 239 emergency room visits the same year for drowning and submersion.\(^3\) While the biggest drowning threat for children is unexpected, unsupervised access to water, thousands of children are treated in the emergency room every year for water-related injuries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Estimated ER-Treated Injuries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Younger than 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>4,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>4,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>4,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>4,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Toddlers, between the age of 1 and 4, are most likely to drown in swimming pools.\(^4\)

In addition to adult supervision, fences, drains, and clean water are critical to pool safety.

**FENCES\(^6\)**
Per Georgia law, fences must:
- Be at least 4 feet tall.
- Have a well-maintained gate that is self-closing and self-latching.
- Completely surround the pool. Houses can be considered the 4th side of the gate, but the homeowner must install a pool alarm on all exterior doors leading to the pool.

**POOL DRAINS\(^7\)**
Per Georgia law:
- Suction outlets must have been tested and meet approved standards.
- The main drain must be visible through the water from the pool edge.
- All drain covers and grates must meet appropriate standards.

**CLEAN WATER**
The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) is the state agency that ensures public swimming pools are clean, healthy and safe.

DPH mandates that children, 3 years and younger, and those not potty trained, wear a swim diaper.\(^7\)

**BUT**
Swim diapers are not leak proof. Diarrhea-causing germs may be delayed from leaking into the water for a few minutes, but these germs still contaminate the water.\(^8\)

Pool inspections are critical to maintaining healthy water quality in public swimming pools.

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The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) is the state agency that ensures public swimming pools are clean, healthy and safe. To ensure minimum standards are met, DPH regularly inspects public swimming pools. Public swimming pools must have:

- A clearly labeled emergency shutoff valve
- A trained operator perform a minimum of 2 weekly visits and document conditions
- Regular collection of water samples to test

**WHY POOL INSPECTIONS ARE IMPORTANT**

Germs that cause water illnesses can be spread in recreational settings when swallowing water that has been contaminated with **fecal matter**. Appropriate levels of disinfectants kill most germs within minutes, but some can survive for days.

### Time to Kill or Inactivate Germs in Chlorinated Water*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Germ</th>
<th>Germ Side Effects Can Include</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>E.coli</em> O157:H7 Bacterium</td>
<td>Watery or bloody diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, and kidney failure</td>
<td>Less than 1 minute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatitis A virus</td>
<td>Fever, Fatigue, Loss of appetite, Nausea, Vomiting Abdominal pain, Dark urine, Diarrhea, Clay-colored stool, Joint pain, Jaundice</td>
<td>About 16 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giardia Parasite</td>
<td>Diarrhea, Gas, Greasy stools that tend to float, Stomach or abdominal cramps, Upset stomach or nausea/vomiting, Dehydration (loss of fluids)</td>
<td>About 45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crypto Parasite</td>
<td>Watery diarrhea, Stomach cramps or pain, Dehydration, Nausea, Vomiting, Fever, Weight loss</td>
<td>About 10.6 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1 part per million (ppm) free chlorine at pH 7.5 or less and a temperature of 77°F (25°C) or higher. Source: CDC

**SWIMMING POOLS IN GEORGIA**

The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) is the state agency that ensures public swimming pools are clean, healthy and safe. To ensure minimum standards are met, DPH regularly inspects public swimming pools. Public swimming pools must have:

1. Don’t swim when you have diarrhea.
2. Shower before you enter the pool.
3. Don’t swallow the water you swim in.
4. Do not pee in the water and always report fecal matter.
5. Don’t swim if pool drain covers are missing, broken, or can’t clearly be seen.
7. Report hazards to your local health department or environmental health office.