

2024 Update of the 2011 Important Information about Drowning **Health and Safety Alert:**

Related Document: [Health and Safety Alert - Summer Safety – Summer Fun](#)

People can drown in lakes, oceans, swimming pools, whirlpools, bathtubs, or showers. Wherever there is water, there is risk.

Near drowning can cause serious impairments and/or brain damage.

Be alert to these contributing factors:

- Inadequate supervision
- Seizure disorder
- Medical emergencies while in the water (heart attack/stroke)
- Use of alcohol or drugs, including prescription medications
- Water conditions, including temperature and clarity, or hidden objects

SUPERVISION SAVES LIVES

DROWNING CAN OCCUR IN SECONDS

BEFORE PARTICIPATING IN SWIMMING/WATER SPORT ACTIVITY:

- Agencies should develop and utilize their best practices, and/or available resources to assess each person's swimming abilities and the level of supervision needed.
- Know each person's health care needs, behaviors and other conditions which may impact upon their safety in the water.
- As indicated by the individual's Life Plan, Plan of Nursing Services (PONS), Staff Action Plan and/or other support plans, one to one supervision must be provided to individuals with seizure disorders or who are not ambulatory.
- Use U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal floatation devices (PFD) for people who cannot swim, those who have seizure disorders and those who are not ambulatory. PFDs must be properly sized and maintained to be effective; however, they are not a substitute for supervision.
- Alert lifeguards to the special needs of individuals; ask lifeguards if the swimming area poses any special risks.
- Before individuals enter the water, assess clarity and temperature of the water, weather conditions, and potential for overcrowding of the area. Provide supervision appropriate to the conditions found.
- Be responsive to and anticipate changing conditions.

IN THE WATER:

- Staff cannot rely upon lifeguards to provide supervision.
- A level of supervision and/or swimming safeguards must be identified and should be documented in either a person's Life Plan, Plan of Nursing Services (PONS), Staff Action Plan or other plans of support for a person.
- Staff responsible for supervising individuals in the water must have the ability to assist the individual at any time while in the water. It is recommended that staff are able to swim when individuals are in more than knee-deep water. In many cases, depending on the person's needs, it is safest for staff to be in the water with the person to safely supervise them.
- Staff must call for help at the first sign of trouble.
- Staff must be specifically assigned to individuals and must maintain visual contact at all times with individuals for whom they are responsible.
- When possible, swimming areas that are less crowded should be considered over more crowded swimming areas as it will allow for easier supervision of individuals in the water.
- Supervision of individuals must not be interrupted by assigned staff to perform other duties, such as escorting individuals to the bathroom.
- Observe all rules of the swimming area.
- Have policy and procedures in place at sites/programs that have a pool onsite.

BATHING:

- Assess each person's needs for bathing supervision and assistance.
- Be aware of each person's health care needs which could impact upon their need for supervision when bathing.
- Levels of supervision and/or safeguards as identified in the Life Plan, Plan of Nursing Services (PONS), Staff Action Plan, or other plans of support are to be maintained while bathing.
- Individuals should never be left alone in the tub or shower if they require supervision when bathing.
- Staff should ensure that all bathing supplies are available in the bathroom before assisting an individual with bathing.
- Staff must be able to correctly operate all special tubs and bathing equipment.
- For people with seizure disorders, showering is safer than bathing.