



## BlueCross BlueShield of Florida

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## Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida Offers Water Safety Tips To Help Families Dive Into Summer

JACKSONVILLE, Fla.— Drowning is the number one cause of death for Florida children under the age of five. And children are not the only victims. According to National Safety Council statistics every year more than 4,000 people drown in our country. A recent survey by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission found that 69 percent of drowning incidents occurred while either one or both parents were supervising their child and that 77 percent of the victims were last seen just five minutes before being missed and later discovered in the pool.

“The majority of these tragedies happen when a child either falls into a backyard pool or is left in a bathtub unsupervised,” said Robert J. Forster, M.D., vice president and medical director of care and network quality for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida’s North Geographic Business Unit. “Taking a few moments to become familiar with the basics of water safety will help families have a safer vacation and ensure that they know what to do in the event of an accident.”

The following are a few tips to help you and your family stay safe as you splash into summer.

- **Never leave a child alone near water.** A child can drown in as little as two inches of water. Drowning is simple suffocation, where the medium blocking breathing is water as opposed to something solid like a pillow or a plastic bag.
- **Keep all doors that lead to the pool area locked.** This means not just the pool gate, but the doors leading to the backyard as well. You also may want to consider purchasing an alarm that sounds when the surface of the pool’s water is disturbed. Your goal is to have as many barriers as possible between children and the pool so that if there is a momentary lapse in adult supervision, there are several backup systems in place.
- **Observe the pool rules.** Rules are posted for good reason – your safety. Do not run. Alcohol and glass containers are not allowed. Always swim with a buddy. Do not push others into the water. Keep pool chemicals out of the reach of children. Do not chew gum while swimming.
- **Be prepared for an emergency.** Have a first aid kit, a telephone and emergency numbers within easy reach. Be sure the proper rescue equipment is readily accessible. Parents should be trained in CPR and should teach their children simple survival tactics such as treading water, floating on their back, throwing floats or extending a pole to a swimmer in need of help and calling an adult to provide further assistance.

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- **Learn to swim.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends swimming lessons for children over the age of three, but reminds parents that there is no such thing as “drown-proofing” your child. “Lessons should teach children not only how to swim, but also to maintain a healthy respect for the water,” warns Dr. Forster. “Overconfidence can lead even good swimmers into dangerous situations.”
- **Never turn your back to the ocean.** Waves are a powerful force of nature that can sweep you away without warning. The U.S. Lifesaving Association estimates that 80 percent of people rescued by lifeguards each year were pulled away from the beach by rip currents (often mistakenly referred to as rip tides or undertows). If you find yourself caught in one of these currents, do not panic. Rip currents pull swimmers away from the shore, not under the water’s surface. Swim parallel to the shore until you are free of the current’s pull or signal for a lifeguard.
- **Avoid Swimmer’s ear.** This common ear infection can be easily prevented by wearing earplugs while swimming, draining the water out of your ears after swimming (to prevent bacteria from remaining inside your ear canal), and/or using a dropper to apply commercial eardrops, isopropyl alcohol or white vinegar inside your ears after leaving the water.

If a child slips underwater for a moment, in most cases he will surface coughing up a bit of water. If the child remains under a bit longer, you will need to act calmly and quickly to remove him from the water, keeping the head lower than the chest. If the child is unconscious, you will need to clear his airway and begin infant or child CPR. Remove wet clothing and wrap the child in a warm, dry blanket before calling an ambulance or taking the child to the nearest emergency room.

The National Safety Council’s First Aid Institute offers first aid and CPR training. For more information, call them at 1-800-621-6244 or consult your health care provider or the local branch of the Red Cross.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida currently covers more than two million customers statewide. The company's North Geographic Business Unit is based in Jacksonville with offices in Panama City, Pensacola, Gainesville and Tallahassee. BCBSF is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies. Standard and Poor's affirmed its 'A+' financial strength and credit rating of BCBSF, based on its strong market position, good earnings profile and excellent capitalization. For more information about BCBSF, visit its world wide web site at [www.bcbsfl.com](http://www.bcbsfl.com).

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