

# Keeping your little one safe around water

What do these things all have in common?



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**Tragically**, these are all places where children and babies have died in home drowning accidents. **In autumn 2014, the national newspapers picked up on the story of a three-year-old boy who drowned in his grandparents' garden pond.** His devastating death, along with those of dozens of other babies and toddlers in the United Kingdom could have been avoided. This is why Public Health England has made preventing home drowning a priority.

The message is simple:

• All water in the home and garden is potentially dangerous

• Babies and children need to be supervised at all times when they are in or near water



# Why do children drown at home?

Children are curious. If they see a pond with fish in it, they will want to reach in and touch the fish. However, they do not have the physical skills to get out of trouble if they fall into water, which is why drowning can happen in even an inch or two of water. Despite a toddler's increased mobility, their co-ordination and stability is still poor and they are unaware of danger.

Babies drown silently and without a struggle. That is why even diverting your attention for one minute to read a text message while the baby is in the bath can be fatal as you will not know that your baby is in trouble. **It is essential to have your full attention on the baby and to never leave a baby alone in water – even for a few seconds.**

## Keeping the home and garden safe

### Bath time



It is important to prepare everything in advance, so that you will not need to leave the room during bath time. Go to the toilet first, turn off any cooking, have towels, nappies, lotion and other equipment at hand. You can make it your policy not to answer the phone or door during bath time. If you need to leave the room, wrap the baby up and take them with you. **Keeping safe is simple: always have your baby with you and make sure that 100% of your presence and focus is on them.**

Bath seats are not safety devices. In fact, an American study showed that 17% of baby bath drownings happened when parents left their baby unsupervised in a bath seat. Infants can slide, wriggle or fall off the seats and if they become submerged, the seat will trap them underwater. Babies need to be watched by a responsible adult. The same study showed that 39% of bath drownings happened when babies were left in the care of their slightly older siblings.

### Garden ponds



Did you know that 39% of British children who drowned at home, drowned in a garden pond? Garden ponds are the leading cause of home drowning for toddlers. For this reason, **the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) advises parents of young children to completely fill in their garden pond.**

It is equally important to make sure that children cannot get into neighbours' gardens, if they have ponds or pools. **Be extra vigilant** when visiting friends and family who have

water features in their gardens and **never leave your child in their garden without supervision.**

If filling in your garden pond is not an option, the next best thing that you can do is to make it as inaccessible as possible, for example, using rigid mesh and suitable fencing. Please refer to [RoSPA's factsheet](#) (see resources on page 4) for detailed information on how to do this.

## Buckets and paddling pools



Empty these after use and don't leave them outside where they can accumulate more water. In a three-year period, 58 children in the USA drowned in buckets left around the home.

## Baths and sinks



The same rule applies, empty them straight away.

## Toilets and bathrooms



The majority of children drown in toilets by falling in head first. You can prevent this by putting childproof locks on toilet lids and using safety locks on toilet and bathroom doors.

## Rainwater storage tanks



Keep them covered at all times and make sure that the lid is firmly sealed.

## Who is supervising?

Most drownings happen when a child is left in someone else's care, for example a grandparent or babysitter. **Recognise this and make sure that you remind the carer you leave your child with to give your child their full attention when they are in or around water.** When you are stressed, rushed or have your attention on too many things at once, home accidents are more likely to occur. Always make sure that you, too, can put your full focus on your child when they are in or around water.

## Get first-aid training

Learning baby and infant first aid could save your child's life as quick action is very important after a child goes underwater. See the Resources section on page 4 for information on local courses.

## Seek out childproofing gaps

Get on your hands and knees and explore your home and garden from a curious child's perspective. What else may be dangerous? What can you do to upgrade your childproofing?

## Quick quiz

**When is it OK to leave my baby unsupervised in the bath?**

- a) If it is for less than one minute
- b) If they are in the bath with their siblings
- c) If the doorbell rings
- d) If they are in a bath seat
- e) Never

Most home drownings of children under age one happen in the bathtub. It is never OK to leave a baby unsupervised.

The answer is E

1

**Is it OK to check text messages while my kids are in the bath?**

- a) Yes
- b) No

See under question 5 for the answer

2

**Will I hear if my baby is drowning?**

- a) Yes
- b) No

Your full attention needs to be on the baby. Babies drown noiselessly and are unable to catch our attention. Bathtub drownings generally occur when the parent's/ carer's attention is distracted for just a few moments.

The answer is B

3

**What percentage of home drownings took place in a garden pond?**

- a) 8%
- b) 26%
- c) 39%
- d) 64%

See under question 5 for the answer

4

**What's the safest thing to do if I have a garden pond?**

- a) Use chicken wire to create a grille over it.
- b) Fill it in completely. Garden ponds are the leading cause of home drownings for toddlers.
- c) Tell my children not to play near the water.

Chicken wire will not take a child's weight, grilles are not always safe and children are too young to understand what is dangerous. If there is water in the garden, they will always need to be supervised when playing outside. Be particularly vigilant when visiting other people's homes.

The answer is B The answer for 2 is B The answer for 4 is C

5

## RESOURCES

For information on making garden ponds as safe and inaccessible as possible, please consult [RoSPA's guidance](#)

Contact the local [Children's Centre](#) for details about free, upcoming first-aid trainings for parents.

The Red Cross runs regular First Aid For Baby and Child Courses in [Barking](#)

To get in touch with the Redbridge CDOP team, which works to prevent child deaths, please contact Monica Clarke, Redbridge CDOP Co-ordinator at [nem-tr.CDOP@nhs.net](mailto:nem-tr.CDOP@nhs.net) tel: 020 8708 5961 or the Senior Admin Officer, on 0208 708 5143.