



Healthy and safe swimming with your child

Key messages:

- Watch your child at all times as children do not understand danger.
- Never leave your child alone in, on or near water.
- Children can drown in seconds and in silence.
- Do not bring a sick child swimming.
- Share this information with everyone who takes care of your child.



Swimming with your children is fun, good for bonding and builds their confidence in the water. Introduce your child to this important life skill as soon as possible. The following advice will help keep your child safe and healthy while they enjoy time in the water - whether at your local pool or while on holidays:

Watch your child at all times:

- Never leave your child alone in, on or near water.
- If you are not within arm's reach of your child, you are too far away. Children can drown in seconds and in silence.
- Do not assume that a child who knows how to swim isn't at risk of drowning. All children need constant and uninterrupted adult supervision in water, no matter what their swimming skills.
- Infants, toddlers and weak swimmers must have a capable adult swimmer within arm's reach to provide "touch supervision".
- Lifeguards are not babysitters. Watch your child at all times.
- Do not drink alcohol before or while you are supervising children who are near or in water.
- Learn water safety and basic life support skills – visit www.iws.ie and www.stjohn.ie for information.

At what age is it safe and appropriate for a baby to be taken swimming in a public pool?

- At any age, once your baby is well and the pool is warm and properly maintained. However, check the pool's admission policy.
- Young babies get cold quickly and easily so water temperature is very important.
- For babies under 3 months of age or weighing less than 5.5 kgs (12lbs), water should be at least 32°C.
- For babies over 3 months of age, water should be at least 30°C.
- If your baby starts to shiver, get out of the water immediately, dry your baby and get them warmed up. Keep a towel close by.
- The temperature of the area around the pool and in the changing rooms is also important. Talk to the swimming pool staff if you have any questions or concerns.
- Women should wait at least until after their six-week post natal check before going swimming. Your doctor will be able to advise you at that visit.

Does the Immunisation Schedule affect my baby's opportunity to go swimming?

- Babies, once well, can be taken swimming at any stage of the immunisation schedule.
- If you are worried about your baby's health, or have a specific query, talk to your GP or other health professional.

Starting your baby swimming – good points to remember:

- Wait at least an hour after your baby's feed before going swimming.
- Build up the time you and your baby spend in the pool: no more than 10 – 15 minutes for the first few visits.
- Watch your baby's face so it does not fall below the water and so you can monitor their reactions.
- Always keep the water up to your baby's shoulder level. Babies out of the water will soon become cold. Remember, if your baby starts to shiver, get out of the water immediately, dry and warm up your baby.
- Keep moving. Your baby becomes aware that by moving their arms and legs they will stay afloat.
- If your baby is sensitive or nervous, hold them close to you and wrap securely in your arms.
- Babies use every instinct to pick up on signals from you on what is safe and unsafe.

- Show that being in the water with you is very safe and lots of fun. Keep your body relaxed. Use lots of eye contact, smile a lot and talk to your baby soothingly.
- Have a towel easily to hand so that you can quickly wrap your baby after getting out of the water.
- Wash your baby immediately after leaving the pool to rinse off any chemicals which could irritate the skin.

If your child is sick – points to note:

- Do not bring a sick child swimming as they should not be exposed to such changes in temperature. Wait until they are fully better before going swimming again.
- If your child had diarrhoea, **wait for two weeks after it clears** before letting them go swimming again (unless a different length of time is advised by your GP or other health professional).
- Even if wearing a swim nappy, one child with diarrhoea could contaminate a whole swimming pool.

What should young children wear in the swimming pool?

- A well-fitting, comfortable swimsuit and, in some pools, a swim hat.
- Babies and toddlers should wear a disposable “swim nappy”. Your pool may have other requirements, such as a neoprene nappy. Talk to staff for advice.
- If using buoyancy aids, make sure they have an approved safety standard mark, fit properly and are appropriate for your child’s age and developmental stage. These aids do not replace the need for supervision - watch your child at all times.

Hygiene in the swimming the pool:

- Teach children not to swallow pool water.
- Germs on your body end up in the water so before and after using the pool, wash babies and younger children and make sure older children and adults shower.
- Swim nappies are not leak proof. Change the nappy immediately when used.
- To keep baby safe and to help prevent germs from spreading in the pool, do not change nappies at the poolside – use the designated changing area and dispose of nappies properly.
- Check your baby’s nappy often and take older children for frequent (every 30 – 60 minutes) trips to the toilet. Waiting to hear “I have to go” may mean that it’s too late!
- Wash hands after using the toilet or changing a nappy.
- Tell the pool attendant or lifeguard on duty if your child poos in the pool or their nappy leaks.
- Your swimming pool may have additional hygiene policies.

Look at your pool and surroundings, especially when visiting a new pool or arriving at a holiday resort:

- Check for missing, uneven or slippery tiles in or around the pool.
- Check how deep the pool is. Make sure children and adults stay in a depth that is safe for them. Be particularly careful in pools where there are no markings.
- Watch out for any sudden drops or changes in the depth of the pool.
- Watch out for child or baby pools that may be next to the main pool without any barrier between them.
- The pool water should be clean and clear. You should be able to clearly see the bottom of the pool. Do not swim in discoloured water.
- Do not allow children to go into a pool until you have checked the safety arrangements.
- Obey all the usual safety rules, for example, no running, running dives or horseplay.

When swimming outdoors, your child needs to wear appropriate sunscreen and protective clothing.

In an emergency, ring 999 or 112 for coast guard, ambulance, fire service or Gardai

Remember, watch your child at all times as children do not understand danger

Visit www.iws.ie for lots of water safety advice and information

For more information about child safety and health, visit mychild.ie



Department of Public Health - Midlands
Revised: May 2018

Information adapted from: Center for Disease Control - Swimming: Protect yourself and your family against recreational water illnesses and Fact sheet for swimmers and parents; Irish Water Safety - Holidaying abroad safely, Pool Safety, Water Safety; The Amateur Swimming Association (UK) - Swimming for babies; Swimming - www.kidshealth.org

