

Swim Lessons Have A Protective Effect Against Drowning

Providing very young children with swimming lessons appears to have a protective effect against drowning and does not increase children's risk of drowning, reported researchers at the National Institutes of Health on March 2, 2009.

"Swimming lessons are appropriate for consideration as part of a comprehensive drowning prevention strategy," said Duane Alexander, M.D., director of the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the NIH Institute at which the study was conducted. "Because even the best swimmers can drown, swimming lessons are only one component of a comprehensive drowning prevention strategy that should include pool fencing, adult supervision, and training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation."

"From our calculations, we are confident that swimming lessons do not increase drowning risk in this age group and likely have a protective effect," Dr. Brenner said.

"Parents and caregivers who choose to enroll their children in swimming lessons should be cautioned that this alone will not prevent drowning and that even the most proficient swimmers can drown," the study authors wrote.

The NICHD sponsors research on development, before and after birth; maternal, child, and family health; reproductive biology and population issues; and medical rehabilitation. For the full article, visit the Institute's Web site at <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/>.

Because of this research, the American Academy of Pediatrics has revised their position on swim lessons. Previously, the AAP recommended infants and toddlers under 4-years-old not be enrolled in swimming lessons. Among the reasons given by the AAP was the belief that enrolling infants and toddlers in swimming lessons could give parents and children a false sense of security around the water, actually increasing the risk of drowning. The lead author of the revised AAP policy Dr. Jeffrey Weiss stated, "it's not a lack of supervision, it's a lapse of supervision" that's most dangerous.

The change was announced in May 2010 in the online journal *Pediatrics*. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the largest pediatrician's group in the US, has done an about face of their position against swimming lessons for children under 4-years-old. The AAP now recommends swimming lessons for children as young as 1-year-old, based on the National Institutes of Health report.

They are encouraging parents to enroll their infants and toddlers in swimming lessons. When enrolling infants and toddlers in swimming lessons, parents should choose a program that emphasizes water safety and requires that an adult participate in the water along with the child. The ideal swimming class should have a ratio of one instructor for no more than 10 students.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. For more information visit: www.aap.org