

Introduction:

- Swimming and lifesaving skills are important life skills - introduce children to them as early as possible with courses from www.iws.ie, www.swimireland.ie and www.waterbabies.ie.
- Do not assume that a child who knows how to swim isn't at risk of drowning - **all children need constant uninterrupted 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".
- Never leave your child alone in, on or near water – **constant responsible adult supervision is most important.** If you are not within arm's reach of your child, you are too far away. **Children can drown in seconds and in silence.**
- Lifeguards are not babysitters – **watch your child at all times.**
- Learn basic life support skills – visit www.stjohn.ie and www.iws.ie for information.

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

- The best age for babies to start pool activities is around four to six months.
- Taking babies younger than this may be unwise as they get cold very easily.
- Before this age your baby can become used to water in the bath - splash your baby gently with water or move him/her gently through the water on his/her back.

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

- No, babies can be taken swimming at any stage of the immunisation schedule.

- If you are worried about your baby's health, speak to your GP or other health professional.

Starting your baby swimming – good points to remember:

- Wait 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.
- Always keep the water up to your baby's shoulder level. Babies out of the water will soon become cold.
- If your baby starts to shiver, it is time to immediately get out of the water.
- Have a towel easily to hand so that you can quickly wrap your baby after getting out of the water.
- Watch your baby's face so it does not fall below the water and so you can monitor his/her reactions.
- Keep moving – your baby becomes aware that by moving his/her arms and legs he/she will stay afloat.
- If your baby is sensitive or nervous, hold him/her 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 – so 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.
- Wash your baby down immediately after leaving the pool to rinse off any chemicals which could irritate the skin.
- The temperature in the pool, changing rooms and outside are really important as

babies cannot control their body temperature.

- Talk to the pool attendant if you have any concerns.

If your child is sick – points to note:

- Do not bring a sick child swimming. A sick child should not be exposed to such changes in temperature.
- Do not bring your child swimming if he/she has an infectious disease, including a heavy cold or diarrhoea.
- Wait for 10 days after an illness has cleared before going swimming (unless a different length of time is advised by your GP or other health professional).

What should young children wear in the swimming pool?

- A tightly fitting, comfortable swimsuit and, in some pools, a swim hat.
- Babies and children who are not toilet trained should wear "swim nappies" and an elasticated type of swimming costume.
- Swim nappies are not leak proof – change the nappy immediately when used.
- To help prevent germs from spreading in the pool, do not change nappies at the poolside – use a toilet or 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!
- Although it may be embarrassing for you if your child accidentally poos or their nappy leaks while in the pool, make sure you tell the pool attendant/lifeguard on duty.
- 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.**

Watch your child at all times:

- Be careful of young children wandering off.
- Remember - **all children need to be supervised in water, no matter what their swimming skills.**
- Even when a lifeguard is on duty, **watch your child at all times. Children can drown in seconds and in silence.**
- Do not drink alcohol before or while you are supervising children who are near or in water. Never swim after drinking alcohol.

Keeping safe in the water:

- Swim with others - never alone or in strange places.
- Swim in designated swimming areas.
- Obey instructions from lifeguards.
- Pay attention to warning notices.
- Swim within your depth, parallel and close to shore.
- Do not swallow the water.
- Do not dive into water.
- Don't stay in cold water for too long and if you or your child starts to shiver or get cramps, get out of the water immediately and get warmed up.
- Look at your pool surroundings, especially when visiting a new pool or when arriving at a holiday resort.
- Check for missing, uneven or slippery tiles in or around the pool.
- Check how deep the pool is and 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.
- Do not allow children to go immediately into a pool until you have checked the safety arrangements.
- Watch out for child/baby pools that may be next to the main pool without any barrier between them.
- Obey all the usual safety rules that apply in any properly run pool, e.g. no running/running dives, horseplay.
- Do not swim in a pool with discoloured water - pool water should be clean and clear – you should be able to clearly see the bottom of the pool.
- Germs on your body end up in the water. Before and after using the pool, wash babies and younger children and make sure older children and adults shower. Wash hands after using the toilet or changing a nappy.
- Do not swim or allow your child to swim with diarrhoeal sickness – swim nappies will not protect from leaks.
- Children should not use Jacuzzis, saunas or steam rooms.
- If swimming outdoors, keep protected from the sun by wearing appropriate sunscreen and protective clothing.

Irish Water Safety (IWS)

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



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 safety, Pool Safety, Water Safety*; The Amateur Swimming Association (UK) - *Swimming for babies: "Two Duckies"* by Newphotoservice © on www.dreamstime.com; *Swimming* - www.kidshealth.org

Child Safety Awareness Programme (CSAP)



Healthy and Safe Swimming



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.**
- **The advice in this leaflet is important both at home and while on holidays.**
- **Share this information with everyone who takes care of your child.**
- **For child safety and injury prevention information visit www.hse.ie/childsafety**

The information in this leaflet contains some points and issues to be aware of for safe and healthy swimming. If you have any specific concerns, please talk to a health professional.

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