

# Residential Pool and Spa Owner's Guide

Brought to you by Safe Kids Grand Forks and Altru Health System



## The following safety features should be considered essentials for your pool:

- » Four sided fencing
- » Self latching gates
- » A pool alarm that senses wave motion
- » Alarms on doors that lead to the pool area
- » Alarms on doggie doors or other unexpected exits
- » Safety vacuum release system

Purchasing and installing a backyard swimming pool increases personal liability and the risk of accidents on a property. Pool owners should contact their home insurance agent to discuss the amount of coverage necessary to protect themselves against litigation. Pool owners should consider increasing their personal liability protection or purchasing an umbrella liability policy to hedge against accidents.

In order to maintain the current amount of insurance coverage, many insurance companies will require important safety features such as a fence to be installed. In Grand Forks, there is a city ordinance that requires all residential pool owners to install four sided fencing around an

in-ground swimming pool.

A common misbelief is that the largest risk for liability is children engaging in horseplay, misuse of the pool, or swimming while intoxicated. But, the largest liability risk is from accidental drowning when the pool is vacant.

It is important for pool owners to know that if someone drowns in their pool, they will be liable even if the drowning victim was not invited onto the pool owners' property.

Seek legal advice or talk to your insurance agent to protect your family from potential litigation.

## Things to consider as a pool owner:

- » Most children were being watched by an adult just before they drowned.
- » Drowning is one of the leading causes of death for children.
- » Approximately 400 children age 14 and younger drown each year in pools and spas.
- » Home swimming pools are the most common place for a child younger than age 5 to drown.



## Neighborhood Watch

Because in-ground pools can be expensive, above ground pools have become a popular option for families with less discretionary income. Above ground pools can be purchased for under \$100.00.

Safety is a concern with above ground pools because most communities do not have a city ordinance regarding safety features such as fencing.

Parents who notice above ground pools in their neighborhood should encourage their neighbors to remove the ladder when the pool is not in use or install fencing around the edge of the pool.

Without fencing, curious youngsters can climb the ladder and fall into the pool where they may not be able to call for help



## POOL RULES

- No Glass
- No Diving
- No Running
- No Food in Pool
- Swim at your own risk
- No Exceptions

*Discuss and enforce pool rules with all patrons of the pool.*

## Basic Pool Rules and Guidelines

As with most things in life, there are general rules that should be followed. Swimming pools are no different, and parents should establish rules before allowing their children to inhabit the water.

### **No running around the perimeter of the pool.**

When the pool deck becomes wet, a child may slip and hit their head causing a concussion or worse the child could become unconscious in the water.

### **No diving in water less than 9 feet deep.**

If a person dives into shallow water, they may strike their head on the bottom of the pool and become paralyzed or unconscious.

### **All children and adults must pass a swim test before entering deep water.**

If a child cannot swim, they should not be traveling to the deep end of the pool. Water wings, noodles, and inner tubes provide a false sense of security and should never be used to allow a child without ample swimming skills to inhabit deep water. The wings, noodle, or tube can easily float away leaving the child to drown. Use a life jacket instead.

These are only a few basic pool rules to consider. Parents should set rules for their pool and enforce the rules at all times. Without specific guidelines for your pool, there is an increased risk of potential hazard. Be sure to ask children if they know the rules and repeat them to reinforce learning behaviors.

*The Virginia Graeme Baker Pool & Spa Safety Act (P&SS Act) takes its name from Virginia Graeme Baker, a young girl who drowned after she was trapped under water by the powerful suction from a hot tub drain.*



This is one of the new federally compliant drain covers. Its features include:

- » Dome Shape
- » Large Surface
- » Small Openings

## Swimming Pool Equipment Updates

In recent years, pool drain requirements have changed. Before the new drains were issued, there were instances of disembowelment and entrapment because children became suctioned to a pool drain.

When a swimmer becomes stuck to a drain or suction outlet, the force of the circulation system can be tremendous. This “suction entrapment” will hold a bather in its grip until the vacuum is broken.

A safety vacuum release system (SVRS) is an automatic suction force release system. If a drain becomes blocked, the SVRS provides a rapid vacuum release. This quickly releases anyone whose body or limb is trapped on the drain. SVRS systems should be installed in all pools.

Virginia Graeme Baker was trapped underwater by the powerful suction of a hot tub drain. Although she was a good swimmer, she was unable to pull herself free. The Pool & Spa Safety Act (P&SS Act) is inspired by Virginia Graeme Baker and establishes safety requirements for pool and spa drains.

The new federally compliant drain covers are dome-shaped to prevent objects or bodies from completely covering the drain. In addition, they have small openings on the drain gate to keep dirt and debris out of the vacuum system and have a large open surface area that allows water to flow slower, making entrapment less likely.

If your pool needs a federally compliant drain, it should be installed by a qualified pool professional.

Drains serve an important function for a pool and are not toys. They suction water into a filter which removes the dirt, debris, and hair from the pool and returns the purified water into the pool.

Children and adults should never approach an uncovered or broken drain or suction outlet or sit on, play with, or damage drain covers.

Drain covers come in different shapes, sizes, and colors. If you have specific questions about the safety of the drain cover installed in your pool, contact a qualified pool professional.

# Prevention of Drowning

To keep summer fun and prevent incidents in your pool, educate your family.

The first and best form of education is learning how to swim. Adults and children alike should know basic strokes and techniques to keep afloat. If children or adults in your family do not know how to swim, Safe Kids encourages them to enroll in swimming lessons.

The YMCA and UND's Swim North Dakota offer swimming lessons to people of all ages and abilities. Children are taught basic swimming strokes and engage in fun activities to desensitize fear of water. Adult swimming lessons are tailored to adult needs and are available year round. Private swimming lessons are also available upon request. Call 701-775-2586 or 701-777-3254 to schedule swimming lessons today.

Backyard pool owners should also have someone educated and trained in CPR. When performed correctly, CPR can save a child's life by restoring breathing and circulation until advanced life support can be given by a health care provider. Permanent brain damage or death can occur when the brain is starved of oxygen for 8 minutes, so CPR is important to administer while emergency medical personnel are on their way.

The North Dakota Safety Council and the American Red Cross offer CPR certification classes in Grand Forks. Visit [ndsc.org](http://ndsc.org) or

[www.redcross.org/en/takeaclass](http://www.redcross.org/en/takeaclass) to sign up today. Classes are available each month.

Most people have never used rescue equipment before and learning proper technique is important. An active drowning victim will require different saving techniques than a passive drowning victim. Active drowning victims will be splashing around trying to get their head above water for air. Passive victims will be nonresponsive.

For active drowning victims, NEVER go in the water unless you are a certified lifeguard.

Active drowning victims will pull you under in an attempt to get to the surface. Instead, lay on the side of the pool and reach your arm out to them. If they are too far away, use a long pole to reach out to them and pull them into safety. If a ring buoy is nearby, you can toss it to them. Note: A ring buoy should not be thrown directly at the person because it may hit them in the face and knock them unconscious making them a passive victim. Throw the buoy over their head or off to the side of them instead.

These are only a few suggestions for pool owners and is not intended to be a comprehensive list. Education is one of the best ways to protect your family against dangers in or near the water. For more information visit [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org).

## Active Supervision

Most children were being watched by an adult just before they drowned. The time it takes to walk away and answer a telephone call is all the time it takes for a child to drown. For this reason, parents need to practice active supervision at all times when children are in or near the pool area.

Active supervision entails watching your child while they are in the swimming pool with full attention.

A parent's full attention means they can point to where their child is at all times even in a busy swimming pool. If you have multiple children to watch, another adult supervisor may be necessary to make sure the environment is safe and there is adequate supervision.

Parents should NOT be reading a book, talking to a friend, or engaging in activities that distract their full attention from their children.

If you are having trouble identifying your children in a busy pool, buy them identifiable swimming suits such as lime green, fluorescent blue, or a pattern that is easily recognizable.

Active supervision is also a great time to reinforce appropriate pool behavior and correct inappropriate behaviors. Enforcing your pool rules will help you maintain control over the safety of the pool.

If parents are not actively supervising their children, the worst case scenario is an unintentional death or injury.



Swimming lessons teach participants how to swim and overcome fear of the water.

**There are many instances where a drowning occurred because there was not a clearly identified person in charge. Safe Kids has a Water Watchers program to identify who has responsibility of the pool supervision. The water watcher carries/wears a lanyard to signify their responsibility. Lanyards are available at Safe Kids Grand Forks free of charge.**

### WATER WATCHER

#### I ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY

for guarding the pool or open water to protect children from drowning. I will not leave my children unsupervised without a replacement.

For more information on water safety, please contact Safe Kids Grand Forks at 701.780.1489.

**We're on the web!**  
www.safekidsgf.com



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## Unintentional injuries are the number one cause of death among children ages 19 and under in the United States.

Each year, one out of every four children needs medical attention for an accidental injury. In addition, most of these unintentional injuries and deaths are preventable.

Safe Kids Grand Forks is one of more than 600 state and local coalitions and chapters in the United States that brings together health and safety experts, educators, corporations, foundations, governments, and volunteers to educate and protect families from unintentional injuries. Safe Kids Grand Forks brings together the expertise of individuals in our region who are dedicated to reducing childhood injuries.



Altru Health System is proud to serve as the lead agency for Safe Kids Grand Forks.

## Life Jackets

Many people conceive life jackets to be bulky and unnecessary, but a life jacket may be your only lifeline during an emergency.

Life jackets come in many shapes, sizes, and varieties which makes it difficult for a first time buyer to choose one. And, if the device is going to save your life, you might just want to pick the right one for you. If the life vest is too large, a person may slip out the bottom and if it is too small it will not have enough flotation.

Life jackets are fitted by weight. Infant jackets are 0-30 pounds, children's jackets are 30-50 pounds or 50-90 pounds, and adult life jackets are 90+ pounds. To check if the size is correct, lift the life jacket from the straps on the shoulders.

If the jacket lifts past the person's ears, it is too large and the person risks falling out of the jacket. A proper fit can look differently on different body types. The flotation may or may not touch on the sides of the life jacket and that is ok as long as the correct life jacket is being worn for the weight.

The most common types of life jackets are near shore life vests and flotation aids.

Near shore life vests are designed for near shore activities where there is chance of a fast rescue. Many will turn an unconscious person face-up in the water. The life vest is worn around the neck with a strap that circles the midsection. These life vests are NOT for water sports like tubing.

Flotation aids are generally considered the most comfortable and are used for sporting activities on the water. They have flotation on the back of the jacket as well as the front with at least three buckles circling the waist. Flotation aids do not turn an unconscious person face-up so these life jackets should be used in places where a quick rescue is expected.

Life jackets do not have an expiration date but should be properly cared for. Rinse life jackets after use in chlorine to maintain the waterproof fabric and hang them to dry. When there are tears or holes in the fabric, the flotation is compromised and the life jacket should be thrown away. Life jackets are great for all ages.

**Ask about our life jacket loaner program. It's great for vacations or pool parties. All sizes are available free of charge. Life jackets can be loaned out for two weeks at a time.**



Near Shore Life Vest



Flotation Aid