“Water is dangerous at any depth. It just takes seconds for a child to drown.”

Introduction
An average of 30 Utahns die\(^1\) from drowning and 141\(^2\) are treated for non-fatal near-drowning incidents every year. Overall, more Utahns are hospitalized or treated in an emergency department (ED) for non-fatal near-drowning incidents than are fatally injured (Figure 1)\(^2\).

On average, one Utahn dies\(^1\) as a result of drowning every two weeks and three Utahns are treated\(^2\) for non-fatal near-drowning incidents every week. Drowning is the third leading cause of death in children ages 1-4\(^1\).

*Mortality data from years 2013-2015, Hospitalizations and Emergency Department Visits data from years 2012-2014. Hospitalizations based on hospital discharge data. Emergency room visits based on emergency room treat and release data.

Utah and U.S.
Utah’s drowning rates have been primarily lower than the national rate for the past 15 years (Figure 2). Utah had the 37th highest drowning rate for all ages in the U.S. from 2011-2015, which was 1.1 per 100,000 \(^1\),\(^4\). For children ages 19 and younger, Utah had the 23rd highest average drowning rate in the U.S from 2011-2015, which was 1.1 per 100,000 \(^1\),\(^4\). Utah’s overall drowning rate in 2015 was 0.8 per 100,000 \(^1\).

Figure 1: Number of Drowning and Non-Fatal Near-Drowning Incidents, Utah 2013-2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Hospitalizations</th>
<th>Emergency Room Visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Rate of Drownings per 100,000 Population by Year, Utah and U.S., 2000-2015 (Age-adjusted)
**Age**
Utahns ages 0-4 and 65+ had significantly higher drowning rates compared to the state rate while Utahns ages 5-14 had a significantly lower drowning rate compared to the state (Figure 3). Utahns ages 0-4 also had a significantly higher rate of emergency department visits (2.2 per 10,000 population) for non-fatal near-drowning incidents and Utahns over 25 years of age had significantly lower non-fatal near-drowning emergency department visits compared to the state rate (0.4 per 10,000 population) (Figure 4).

Drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 1-4 in Utah. From 2013-2015, 26 Utah children ages 19 and younger died from drowning. There are three distinct patterns in Utah child drowning deaths:

- **Toddlers (ages 1-4) wandering off:** The most common scenario involves an under-supervised child wandering off during a weekend family gathering – with several adults present but none designated as the official “child watcher” – and falling into a body of water (like a pool, stream, pond, creek, or irrigation ditch). In some cases, the child was thought to be indoors but had managed to get out of the house undetected.

- **Teens (frequently males) swimming with friends at a reservoir or lake:** Many of these deaths are “witnessed” drownings, where friends or family members see the victim go under the water and are unable to rescue them. Overestimating swimming abilities and peer pressure to take risks are thought to be factors in these deaths.

- **Infants left unattended in bathtubs:** These drownings also include cases where an infant was left alone in a bathtub with an older brother or sister.

Drowning can happen even when a child is being supervised. Many people do not realize that drowning is often silent. This means someone who is drowning is not able to shout for help or grab onto something. When they come above water they only have time to inhale and exhale. It is important especially for parents of young children to be fully aware of the risk of drowning and be able to identify signs of a drowning child.

**Sex**
Overall, Utah males (1.4 per 100,000 population) had a significantly higher drowning death rate, compared to Utah females (0.8 per 100,000 population) (Figure 5). Utah males also had higher non-fatal drowning-related emergency room visit rates (0.4 per 10,000 population) compared to Utah females (0.3 per 10,000 population) (Figure 6).
**Location**

The following Utah Small Areas had significantly higher rates that the state rate:

**Highest Drowning Age-Adjusted Death Rates (2000-2015)**
- SLC (Glendale)

**Highest Drowning Age-Adjusted Hospitalization Rates (2000-2014)**
- Washington County (Other)

**Highest Drowning Age-Adjusted Emergency Department Rates (2010-2014)**
- Pleasant Grove/Lindon, American Fork/Alpine, Lehi/Cedar Valley, St. George

This is the small area of residence, not necessarily where the drowning occurred. The largest percentage (43%) of drowning deaths of Utah children occurred in open water, which includes rivers, lakes, canals, and reservoirs (Figure 8).

**Time of Death**

Child drowning deaths happen most frequently during the summer months (Figure 7). On Average, 75% of child drowning deaths occur in Utah between May and September.

**Cost**

The average total charges per year from 2012-2014 for Utah drowning emergency department visits and hospitalizations was $644,581.

**Signs of Drowning**

- Head low in the water, mouth at water level
- Head tilted back with mouth open
- Eyes glassy and empty, unable to focus or closed
- Hair over forehead or eyes
- Vertical in water – not using legs
- Hyperventilating or gasping
- Trying to roll over on the back or trying to swim but not making headway
- Appear to be climbing an invisible ladder
Tips to keep kids safe in the water

Keeping your child safe is your number one priority. Water is dangerous at any depth. It can take just seconds for a child to drown. Water can be a lot of fun, but there are some things you can do to make sure your child stays safe.

- Children can drown in as little as one inch of water. Make sure to prevent children from gaining access to areas of the house where water is present (i.e. bathtubs, sinks, and toilets). Never leave an infant or young child alone in the bathtub or with “older” siblings.
- When not in use, drain and keep kiddie pools and buckets out of reach from children.
- Enclose pools and hot tubs with self-closing and locking gates/fences.
- Actively supervise children in and around bathtubs, pools and open bodies of water, giving undivided attention, and watching for signs of drowning. Children with intellectual disabilities and seizure disorders are more susceptible to drowning and should be more closely monitored. If several adults are present, designate a “child watcher” to watch children in and around the water. Adults should take turns so everyone can have fun and stay safe.
- No matter where children might swim, teach them to always swim with an adult. Even older, more experienced swimmers should swim with a partner. Teach kids when they are young that they should never go around water without an adult present. Warn teenagers of the risks of overestimating how well they swim. Even experienced swimmers can drown. Never dive into unknown or shallow waters.
- Learn CPR. Being able to perform CPR if needed is an essential skill that every parent should have to be able to use if needed.
- Wear a life jacket. Especially out in open water a life jacket will help give children and adults extra support in the water. Even expert swimmers should wear a life jacket. Have everyone wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket while on a boat or during water sports. Children should also wear a life jacket when near open bodies of water.
- If you are having a hard time locating your child, check areas where they might gain access to water first.

Resources

- National Drowning Prevention Alliance [ndpa.org/](ndpa.org/)
- Drowning Prevention Foundation [drowningpreventionfoundation.com/](drowningpreventionfoundation.com/)
- Safe Kids, Water Safety [www.safekids.org/watersafety](www.safekids.org/watersafety)
- Healthy Children Drowning Prevention [www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Drowning.aspx](www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Drowning.aspx)

References

4 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS), 1999-2014 data [cited 2017 June].
5 Utah Department of Health, Office of Medical Examiner, Utah Medical Examiner Database.

If your life has been affected by drowning, the Utah Department of Health wants to hear from you. Share your story with the Utah Health Story Bank at [www.health.utah.gov/bhp/sb/](www.health.utah.gov/bhp/sb/).