

Water Safety 4 Kids

Water is needed on every farm. Visit a small town coffee shop at the end of June after five weeks of no measurable rain and you'll hear about the importance of water. From germinating new seeds, to quenching the cattle's thirst, to washing the mud off the pickup, water plays an important role on farms and ranches.

With this need also comes a danger. The hazards of water falls into two categories: (1) physical safety hazards that come from the water that can cause drowning and (2) health hazards that result from drinking contaminated water. Adults are responsible for protecting children from both risks. Children are responsible for identifying the associated risks and staying away from the hazards as they mature.

Total Population Drowning

Drowning is a leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths to children under age 15. It is estimated that for each childhood drowning approximately four children are hospitalized for a near-drowning (Wintemute, 1990). Annually, drowning and near-drowning injuries among children younger than 15 in the United States result in an estimated cost of \$6.2 billion.

Rural Youth Drowning

Farms and ranches hold special water-related hazards for children. Drowning rates for all age groups are three times higher in rural areas compared to urban areas (Baker, 1992). According to CDC/NIOSH (July 2001) drowning was the second leading cause of death on farms (27%), with children younger than 5 accounting for 32% of the deaths. Drowning was the leading cause of farm deaths in 17 states. Children under age four are at highest risk for drowning in farm ponds (Murphy, 1995). Toddlers characteristically have heads that are disproportionately large for their bodies and therefore, can drown in very small amounts of water and can become trapped in a bucket of water if they fall in head first. Childhood drownings in rural areas often occur in non-pool settings, such as natural bodies of water and irrigation canals (Hwang 1997, Agocs 1994, Vimpani 1988). The risk of drowning increases in the muddy water of lakes, ponds, and rivers (Quan 1989).



Physical dangers of water access exposure

Wells and cisterns are common on many farms and ranches. All wells and cisterns should be safely covered, especially if abandoned. The best way to prevent injury is to fill in an abandoned well. Irrigation and the process of getting water to the intended watering location can create hazards. Irrigation motor drive shafts can entangle loose clothing if caught in an unshielded mechanism. Water and electricity can be a deadly mix, although both are used within the irrigation process. Instruct children to take caution not to touch electrical sources while in water.

Health related dangers

Drinking contaminated water is a health risk. Water from rural water supplies may be contaminated by agricultural fertilizer and pesticide runoff, livestock wastes or other pollutants. Caution should be taken to ensure the sanitation of this much needed resource.

Prevention Strategies

- Supervise children at all times when around water, but especially when the very young are near water such as canals, ponds, streams, lagoons, etc.
- Fence in all ponds and lagoons. Post *No Trespassing* signs.
- Install self-closing, self-latching gates on all fencing.
- Provide personal flotation devices where swimming is allowed.
- Install a rescue post with an empty plastic milk jug, a long pole, and emergency phone numbers by each body of water.
- Install proper safety shielding on all irrigation mechanisms.
- Sample and test your water sources for water quality.

Water is needed on the farm and ranch to survive and prosper. Stay safe and healthy by using precaution when around this life-giving element.

