



Child safety update - child drowning and use of bath seats: Advice for Children and Young People (CYP) stakeholders

Background

Unintentional drowning remains an important and avoidable cause of child injury and death. London Child Death Overview Panels (CDOPs) have informed PHE London of child deaths which occurred in baths and requested PHE London to highlight the issue of preventable child drowning related to the use of bath seats

Aims

- To summarise the evidence about babies/children drowning
- To develop an evidence-based resource about prevention of babies drowning in baths, where bath seats are used, that can be shared with CDOPs and other key stakeholders

Key facts about child drowning

In the UK:

- About thirteen child deaths (under 5 years) each year are due to drowning
- One in four of these drowning deaths occurred in a bath
- For each drowning fatality, there are eight non-fatal drowning events serious enough to require hospitalisation
- In 2008-12, nine times more child deaths (under 5 years) occurred in a bath than in natural water (sea, rivers or lakes)

Risk factors for babies/children drowning in a bath

- Inadequate supervision - leaving an infant in a bath seat unattended or co-bathing (with another child) for any period of time is the most common factor associated with accidents due to a child's vulnerability
- Age - babies and infants are more likely to be placed in a bath seat and young children are at risk of drowning if supervision is absent. Children aged 0 to 4 years are most at risk. The carer needs to be aware that although the baby can seat unsupported they are unable to right themselves if they fall over in the water
- Inappropriate use of nursery equipment - hazard patterns for the use of bath seats described in the US indicated the use of a non-bathing baby seat in a water-filled bathtub
- Others - lower socioeconomic status, learning disabilities, behavioural disorders and underlying medical conditions eg epilepsy

Drowning and the use of bath seats

- Drowning accidents involving bath seats can occur because parents or carers develop a false sense of security, regarding them as safety measures as opposed to bathing aids requiring constant adult supervision
- A child can tip over and become trapped when bath seat suction caps dislodge due to the child's movement, use of bath oils or incorrect levels of bath water. Children may also climb out of bath seats
- The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) reports one in three accidental drowning deaths in children (2 years or under) involving bath seat
- 20% of survivors may suffer brain damage requiring lifelong financial and health care support. Prognosis is much worse if the time of immersion exceeds 5-10 minutes

Actions to prevent drowning in baths

- Educate carers and parents on safe bathing and the dangers from using unconventional equipment in the bath as standard practice in antenatal care, baby, parenting or children groups and programmes
- Train carers and parents in rescue and resuscitation techniques to minimise severity of outcomes from accidents
- Develop consistent regional safety awareness messages across London
- Local areas should be encouraged to review current practices and address any gaps. Awareness should include advice that:
 - Drowning is a silent death. A child in distress is unable to alert or cry out and constant touch is recommended while bathing an infant in a bath seat
 - Constant supervision is the only way of preventing child drowning. An adult **MUST** always be within arm's reach of a child in or near water and check that the bath seat's suction cups grip the bath firmly
 - Drowning injuries arise because a person cannot adequately breathe and obtain oxygen. Even if a person is quickly retrieved from water while drowning, they may have stopped breathing and suffer brain damage as a result of a lack of oxygen - learn simple resuscitation skills

References

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Acknowledgements: Special thanks to Dr Sarah Panjwani, Dr Charmari Wijemanne, Professor Mitch Blair, Graeme Walsh, London CDOP leads and RoSPA for their contributions

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KEY FACTS ABOUT CHILD DROWNING AND BATH SEATS

Unintentional drowning remains an **important** and **avoidable** cause of child injury and death

Child drowning deaths in the bath related to using bath seats have occurred in London

In the **UK**:



About **13** child deaths (under 5 years) each year are due to drowning



1 in 4 of these drowning deaths occurred in a bath



For **each** drowning fatality, there are **8** non-fatal drowning events serious enough to require hospitalisation

A child can drown in as little as a few centimetres of water and in as little as two minutes



In 2008-12, **9x more** child deaths (under 5 years) occurred while in a bath than in natural water (sea, rivers or lakes)



1 in 3 accidental drowning deaths in children aged 2 years or under involve a bath seat

Babies in infant bath seats have drowned when the:



- Suction cups became loose and the seat tipped over
- Baby slipped through a leg opening of the seat
- Baby tried to climb out of the seat

A bath seat is **NOT** a safety device



Some parents think that using a baby bath seat will keep their child safe, but baby bath seats do **NOT** prevent drowning

Actions to prevent drowning in baths:



- Never leave young children alone in a bath even for a minute
- Keep your baby in sight and within arms reach at all times
- Empty the bath after use
- Learn simple resuscitation skills

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January 2015