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To Prevent Drowning Practice Touch Supervision

PENSACOLA – The Escambia County Health Department promotes the practice of “touch supervision” to prevent drowning. “Touch supervision” means an adult is always at arm’s length of a child who is in or near water.

According to the Florida Department of Health’s Office of Injury Prevention, drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death in the U.S. for children between the ages of 1 and 4. Based on 2009 surveillance data, Florida leads the nation in drowning deaths that occur mostly in swimming pools and natural/open water, but they may also happen in bathtubs, toilets, buckets, and wading pools.

The Escambia County Health Department began promoting “touch supervision” countywide in 2009. “We feel that touch supervision is the most effective way to prevent drowning,” said Dr. John Lanza, health department director. “It is a practice supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Florida Pediatric Society.”

Dr. Lanza explained that “watching” is inadequate to prevent drowning. The “watcher” could be anywhere in the vicinity of the pool. However, with “touch supervision”, the parent is actually sitting on the side of the pool or in the water within “an arm’s length” from the child.

In addition to practicing touch supervision, the CDC recommends the use of these guidelines:

- **Fence it off.** Install a four-sided isolation fence, with self-closing and self-latching gates, around backyard swimming pools. This can help keep children away from the area when a parent cannot supervise them.
- **Make life jackets a “must.”** Make sure kids wear life jackets in and around natural bodies of water, such as lakes or the ocean, even if they know how to swim. Water wings, noodles, inner tubes or any other air-filled or foam toys are not designed to keep swimmers safe.
- **Learn CPR.** Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and get recertified every two years. CPR can help a child stay alive with little or no brain damage.
- **Be on the look out.** Adults should always remain within an arm’s distance to assure the safety of the children around bathtubs, swimming pools, and natural bodies of water.

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