

Fast Facts

Open Water Drowning by the Numbers

A new report from [Safe Kids Worldwide](#) and Nationwide's [Make Safe Happen](#) program explores drowning dangers, with a specific focus on lakes, rivers, oceans, reservoirs and other types of open water. Here's a glimpse at some of the report's findings.

Overall Drowning Statistics

- Drowning is the **number one** cause of injury death for children 1-4 years of age. It is the second leading cause of injury death for children 5-14 years of age and the third leading cause of injury death for children 15-19 years of age, as well as for children under 1.
- An estimated 1,000 children fatally drown in a single year, 70 percent of them between May and August.
- And research shows that for every fatal child drowning, nearly seven children are seen in the emergency room (ER) because of a non-fatal drowning incident. That translates to **150 families each week** who experience a frightening or tragic water event. And these numbers don't capture the other children who are rescued onsite and never taken to the ER.
- The medical costs of childhood drownings in the U.S. in 2015 were estimated at **\$68.5 million**.

Open Water Dangers

- Most children in the U.S. drown in open water, a term that includes natural bodies of water (lakes, rivers, oceans) and man-made bodies of water (canals, reservoirs, retention ponds). In 2016, open water drownings made up **43 percent** of fatal childhood drownings, compared to 38 percent in pools, 9 percent in bathtubs and 10 percent unspecified.
- While overall childhood drowning rates have declined by 28 percent since 2000, open water drowning deaths have declined by only **13 percent**.
- Roughly **38 percent** of open water drownings among children occur in a lake. About 24 percent occur in a river, and 20 percent in a pond. Only 3.8 percent of open water drownings occur in the ocean.

Who's Most at Risk

- As children get older, they are more at risk of fatally drowning in open water. Between ages 1 and 4, 57 percent of drownings occur in pools and 22 percent in open water. More than half of open water drownings occur in children under 15. By the time children are older than 15, the risk of

open water is far greater: only **9 percent** of children 15-19 years of age drown in pools, compared to **73 percent** in open water.

- Boys are at a much greater risk of a fatal open water drowning than girls, with **84 percent** of open water drownings in children ages 0-19 occurring in males. This difference is greater than fatal pool drownings, where **68 percent** are male.
- Black/African American children are **twice as** likely as White children to fatally drown in open water. The risk for Native American children is even greater, at 2.4 times the rate of their White counterparts. For males, the highest drowning rates were found among Black/African American males ages 15-19

Source: [Hidden Hazards: An Exploration of Open Water Drowning and Risks for Children. May 2018](#)