

Aquatic Safety Newsletter

The Water Floatie Fallacy An Important Message for Parents

Attention all parents: Leave floaties at home! It is not advised to use floaties, such as water wings for your children if they cannot swim (CDC, 2016). You *should* use U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) approved life jackets.

What's the difference?

Floaties can actually contribute to drownings and USCG life jackets prevent them. **“Floating” devices can be confusing.** Shopping up and down the aisles of many stores, big and small, there is a plethora of swimming pool swim “gear” for small children. These include flotation suits, water wings, noodles, and inflatable rafts and tubes. Unfortunately, many products look safe that are not.

Don't let foam fool you!

Foam and inflatables are typically associated with floating. However, many products with foam that look like they should keep children afloat will not. Additionally, consistent with the saying “what goes up, must come down,” flotation devices that inflate can deflate (or fall off) (unless properly-fitting USCG jacket), leading to a child up on the surface to sink down.

USCG life vests should not be confused with other types of vests for the water. **The variations in vests can be life or death!** A “vest” for swimming, such as swim vests not USCG approved and flotation suits are intended for swim assistance, not life protection.

Many types of vests for young children in popular stores are swim **aids** rather than **safety** devices; these are not USCG approved life jackets. Many vests are intended for a child to swim with, including under the water, and will not keep the child safely on the surface, unless USCG approved and properly fitted.



The CDC specifically warns against Water Wings



This swim aid looks similar to a style of USCG swimming pool life jacket for youngsters.

However, this device states “...not a lifesaving device intended for a level 3 swimmer”



(Courtesy of Water Safety Products)

Inside label of a USCG approved life jacket for non-swimmers at swimming pools or all swimmers in open water settings.

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Just like shopping for groceries, be sure to check the label (for “safety contents”)

Children’s swim gear is not designed for deceit, but *buyer beware*. There are simply a variety of products out there and it can become confusing. In a study by Aquatic Safety Research Group, out of 64 parents with children under the age of five, 33% reported using USCG life jackets for their children, mostly in or around open water, 13% reported using life jackets for their children, but were *unsure* if they were USCG approved, 14% reported using life jackets or swim vests that were *not* USCG approve, and **41% reported they do *not* use life jackets for their children for any body of water.** Many swim aids are fun and useful for children who *can* swim and *are* comfortable in the water. They can be used to aid children in new skills, adding some buoyancy. Vests that are swim aids, but not safety devices will typically state a message indicating the product is not intended for safety, often as bluntly as “not a lifesaving device.”

If your child is a weak or inexperienced swimmer, USCG life jackets are a must for safety in swimming pools and other aquatic environments and a requirement for all swimmers in some settings. When it comes to child safety around the water, *it’s better to be safe than sink!* If a life jacket is USCG approved, this will also be indicated on the label (United States Coast Guard approval #).

Bottom Line

All children should always be actively supervised in, on, and around all bodies of water. When hitting the swimming pool, even if just in your backyard, if your child cannot swim comfortably, a USCG approved life jacket is your safest bet (still with “within-arm’s-reach” supervision), along with other layers of protection. Be sure to properly-fit an appropriately sized USCG life jacket on your child (guidelines are usually included with jackets) and ensure the life jacket stays on your child at all times, including *around* the water and “in-between” swims. If your child can swim comfortably, you can have at other swim gear (again, still with adult supervision). USCG life jackets *are* intended for safety with proper fit, use and adherence to instructions. It is their sole purpose, around since the 1800s. And luckily, there are many these days that are cute too.

Safety Contents

1 Child

USCG approved life jacket 100%
swimming pool for young and inexperienced swimmers
INCLUDE arm’s reach supervision always

Open Water

USCG approved life jacket 100%
Recreational boaters, swimmers, and water sports. Check specific requirements for water governing agency and state. Details may vary for age, situation, and environment.
INCLUDE supervision always

Supervision

100%
Every time regardless of level or environment

Residential Swimming Pools 100%

Barriers
Self-closing, self-latching gate(s)
Alarms/Detection Technologies
Supervision
Life jackets

...
<https://www.poolsafely.gov/>

Water Wings 0%

****Percentages listed indicate suggested amount for use; not guaranteeing safety.***

Upcoming Aquatic Safety Research Group Presentations

- NRPA Congress, Baltimore, MD | Sept. 24-26
- World Conference on Drowning Prevention, Durban, South Africa | Oct. 8-10

Look for the *Second Issue* of the *NEW* quarterly Aquatic Safety Newsletter this Winter!