

Drowning

A study by the Canadian Red Cross shows infants and toddlers aged 1-4 years have among the highest drowning rates in Canada.

In the latest Drowning Report based on the most recent statistics available from 1999, 24 Canadian toddlers suffered water-related fatalities. It is generally considered that for every death, there are an estimated four to five additional near-drownings, which require hospitalization.

“The tragedy of drownings and near-drownings are particularly heart-wrenching when you consider most of these incidents were preventable,” said Rick Caissie, Canadian Red Cross National Director of Injury Prevention Programs. “Toddlers are at high risk because they are naturally curious. And while they are able to walk, they are unstable, tend to be unaware of and unable to assess risks in their environment. They also lack the capacity for self rescue.”

The Red Cross study showed that in nearly half of infant and toddler drownings, the victims were alone, 38 per cent occurred while toddlers were supervised by adults and 17 per cent occurred while they were supervised by minors.

There are approximately 38,000 private pools in Ontario, so the danger is real,” said Caissie. “The solution is security and supervision. There is no substitute for adult supervision. But adults also need to ensure that their backyard pools meet local fencing and safety requirements and safety equipment is on hand at all times.”

The Drowning Report chronicles one heartbreaking situation in which a small boy was playing in the yard with other children in a private condominium complex. His father instigated a search when the boy didn't respond to his calls. Upon noticing that one of the gates enclosing the pool was open, the father checked the pool and found the child face down in the water. Resuscitation was not successful. The pool was properly fenced, but lacked self-locking gates to prevent children from entering the pool area, unsupervised.