

# Parents: Bath time is a time to pay attention. Here's why.

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Lost in a gleeful moment surrounded by rubber duckies, perfume-free soapsuds and the sweet giggles of a child, no parent wants to imagine the worst. But the bathroom can be a terrible place for young children if a caretaker takes even a quick moment to do something else.

January marks National Bath Safety Month, but, obviously, this is a year-round issue. Why? “More children actually die in bathtubs than accidental shootings in the U.S.,” asserts Jonas Sickler, a spokesman for watchdog site [ConsumerSafety.org](http://ConsumerSafety.org).

It's a chilling statement. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics reports drowning overall is the leading cause of unintentional injury death in children 1 to 4 years old (7,543), outranking accidental shootings, poisonings, falls, and smoke/fire exposures combined (4,590), according to an examination of data from 1999-2015 data. Annually, an average 37 toddlers drowned in the tub, while 18 were victims to accidental firearm discharges.

“You have to understand that in a blink anything can happen,” cautions Jack Maypole, a primary care pediatrician and director of the Comprehensive Care Program at Boston Medical Center.

Houston mom Kristin Fuller, 32, experienced what can transpire in a flash while her 2-year-old daughter, Paige, was in their tub last August: “I was picking up the clothes in the bathroom and folding clothes on our bed. She decided she could climb out of the tub by herself while I wasn’t watching and slipped and fell onto the bathroom floor.” Paige wasn’t injured, and today Fuller plants herself firmly in the bathroom no matter how much laundry is scattered about. “It can wait,” she adds.

One in 5 parents have left their child alone in the bathtub or pool, according to a June 2016 report from Nationwide’s Make Safe Happen program and childhood consumer safety group Safe Kids Worldwide, which was founded by the Children’s National Health System. And 2 in 5 admit being distracted while their child was in the tub.

Why are some parents walking away, either mentally or physically? Some experts agree there’s a false sense of security when safety devices are around. For example, infant bath seats are a popular bathing aid, but many authorities advise against them as they’re known to tip over, which could cause a child to fall into the water and drown.

“People don’t think their child will drown when giving them a bath, but it does happen,” says Shoba Srikantan, who specializes in Pediatric Critical Care Medicine at Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children in Orlando. “There’s no perfect bath seat; you still have to have one hand on your child and be very vigilant about it.” She estimates throughout her 13 years of practice at Arnold Palmer she’s seen about 100 children who have drowned, ranging from incidences in the family bathroom to the backyard hot tub to the neighborhood swimming pool. “In the face of 10 minutes, your life could be destroyed.”

Sickler echoes the sentiment. “Parents wouldn’t put their baby in a bath seat on top of a dresser, or at the top of the stairs, and walk away [because] they would be concerned of the seat tipping over,” he writes in an email. “Yet they aren’t concerned about the danger of the shallow water.”

So what’s a parent to do? Stick with your primary care doctor’s advice regarding water safety, and visit trusted resources like the American Academy of Pediatrics’ (AAP) [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) and Nationwide’s [MakeSafeHappen.com](https://www.makesafehappen.com) for on-demand guidance. Here are some precautions experts agree parents can take to reduce the chance of accidents in the porcelain room.

1. **Check the water temperature.** The Mayo Clinic recommends bath water should be around 100 degrees F. You should ensure the temperature isn’t too hot by checking the it with your hand prior to putting your child in the tub.
2. **Opt for a pint-size bathtub.** While the idea of using an infant bath seat or inflatable tub is tempting, most experts don’t recommend them. AAP, Consumer Reports and Nationwide Children’s Hospital, among others, advise parents to use a hard plastic bathtub as an alternative.
3. **Keep it at 2 inches.** Fill the infant tub with no more than 2 inches of water. Make sure it’s on a flat surface when filling, and never add water to the tub with the baby inside. If the infant tub is in a regular bathtub, make sure the drain is open so excess water doesn’t fill the larger tub’s reserve (it could cause the infant tub to float and tip).
4. **Stay alert.** While obvious, it’s worth mentioning to always be within arm’s reach when around water, because a small child can drown in less than an inch of water.
5. **Review the news.** [Subscribe](#) to recall alerts from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to ensure you never miss a recall notice about child products. An infant bath seat and infant tub were recalled in 2016, one baby float was recalled in 2015, and four bath seats were recalled in 2013.

With this advice in mind, don’t forget to enjoy the bath-time ritual.

“It’s really something you should cherish, but be present and be alert,” adds Maypole. “Get down on your knees, roll up your sleeves, get bubbles on your chin and suds on your clothes. Squeal. Have fun. Goodness — and cleanliness — will follow.”

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