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Is your child wearing the proper life jacket?

Learn about the best life jackets for kids and how to find the right fit for your child

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Not all life jackets or floaties are created equal. In fact, many of them have a warning on them that says: "WARNING: This is NOT a life-saving device."

While floaties for kids (like inflatable water wings or a vest with cartoon characters on it) might be cute, the safest and most effective options are U.S. Coast Guard approved puddle jumpers or life jackets for kids.

Jesus Alderete, Program Manager of Injury Prevention at Children's Health, explains the difference between the two life-saving devices and shares advice on how to find the right fit for your child.

Puddle jumpers

Puddle jumpers are a type of personal flotation device that also serves as a swim aid for young children. It's a combination of a life vest and water wings. Unlike water wings, U.S. Coast Guard approved puddle jumpers do not slip off or deflate and have been proven to prevent drowning by reliably keeping a kid's head above water.

Puddle jumpers can come in different sizes and designs but they do have a few limitations when compared to life jackets, including:

- Puddle jumpers typically work best for babies (under 30 lbs.) and younger children (30-90 lbs). Make sure you find the right size for your child's weight.
- Puddle jumpers are designed to keep children in a vertical (or upright) position in the water, but sometimes kids can tip forward putting their face in the water.

DID YOU KNOW?

Teaching kids how to swim can greatly reduce their risk of drowning. [Learn when to start swim lessons for kids.](#)

Life jackets

Life jackets are the safest type of flotation device to put on a child when they check these requirements:

- **U.S. Coast Guard approved.** You can often locate this label on the inside of the life jacket on the back flap.
- **Correct size for their weight.** If the life jacket comes up above your child's ears, then it is too big and they risk sliding out of it. If you have the right size for your child and it still rides up, you can use the straps that go between their legs.
- **Snug fit.** Make sure the life jacket is strapped tightly.
- **Includes a back flap.** This is especially important for children under 30 pounds. A back flap can become a pillow, which is designed to keep a child's face from ending up in the water if they lose consciousness.

REMEMBER

Personal flotation devices like puddle jumpers and life jackets are not a substitute for adult supervision. When a child is in or around water, constant supervision is the most important layer of protection to help prevent drowning.

Learn More

The Children's Health Injury Prevention team is committed to keeping your family safe. Learn more about our [water safety program](#), and other ways to [keep children safe in the water](#).

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