



What You Need to Know about Life Vests for Children

What Is a Life Vest?

A life vest or a life jacket is a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (PFD) that helps you and your child float and stay warm in the water.

Why Should Your Child Wear a Life Vest?

Drowning is often silent, occurs within minutes and often when an adult is nearby. No one can watch a child every second. Here are guidelines for wearing life vests:

- *Children between birth and five years:* on beaches, docks, in boats, rafts or inner tubes, in or near the water.
- *Children between the ages of 6-11:* on docks, boats, rafts, inner tubes and river banks, or while swimming in open water like lakes, rivers or the ocean.
- *Teens and adults:* on boats, rafts or inner tubes, or while swimming in open water like lakes, rivers or the ocean.

Buying a Life Vest:

There are different types of life vests: Types I, II, III, IV and V. Type I is for boating in rough or remote water where rescue may be delayed. Type IV is a boat cushion or rescue ring. It does not replace a life vest and should not be used by children. The types most helpful for near-shore boating and other water activities are:

- *Type I* — good for calm, inland water where there is a good chance of fast rescue. Smaller sizes often have neck collars to help keep a child's face out of the water.
- *Type II* — provides similar flotation to Type I and offers the most comfort and freedom of movement. It comes in many styles and sizes, from small child through adult. It is also best used in calm water where there's a good chance of fast rescue.
- *Type V* — for special uses and includes inflatables. Even if you don't own a boat, buy a life vest for yourself and your child. There may not be one that fits to rent or borrow. Carry life vests in your car during the summer.

When Buying a Life Vest, Check for:

- Coast Guard approved label.
- A snug fit. Check weight and size on the label and try the life vest on your child. Pick up your child by the shoulders of the life vest; the child's chin and ears won't slip through a proper fit. If one style does not work well, try another one.
- Head support for younger children. A well designed life vest will support your child's head.
- A strap between the legs for younger children.
- Comfort and appearance. This is very important for teens.
- Color. A brightly colored life vest is easier to see.
- NOTE: The new inflatable-design life vests are not recommended for children under 16 years old.

How Do You Use a Life Vest?

- To work best, fasten all straps, zippers and ties.
- Every spring, check the life vest for fit, and wear and tear. Throw it away if you find air leakage, mildew or rot.
- If a child panics in the water and thrashes about, he may turn onto his face. Have your child practice wearing a life vest and leaning back in the water.
- As your child grows, make sure he continues to have a life vest that fits and that is appealing.
- Never alter a life vest. It could lose its effectiveness.
- Wear your life vest to set an example and be prepared.
- Never use toys like plastic rings, water wings or rafts in place of a life vest.

Remember: Life vests only work when they are worn, and they do not take the place of adult supervision!

For More Information

- Talk to your health care provider
- Visit the **Osceola County Drowning Prevention Website:** www.swimsafeosceola.com