



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, takes as little as five minutes and usually happens 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 or around deep or swift 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 non-lifeguarded open water like lakes, rivers or the ocean.

Buying a Life Vest:

There are different types of PFDs: 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 wearable life vest and should not be used by children. The types most helpful for near-shore boating and other water activities are:

- *Type II* — 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 III* — provides similar flotation to Type II and offers the most comfort and freedom of movement. It comes in a variety of 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, you should buy a life vest for 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 the child's head when the child is in the water.
- A strap between the legs for younger children. This is a good feature because it helps prevent the life vest from coming off.
- Comfort and appearance. This is very important for teens, who are less likely to wear a life vest.
- 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. Tuck in any loose strap ends.
- Every spring, check the life vest for fit as well as 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. This will help prevent panic and rolling over.
- 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 own life vest to set an example, to be prepared and to help your child if an emergency occurs.
- Never use toys like plastic rings, water wings or rafts in place of a life vest.
- For more information, visit our website at www.seattlechildrens.org/dp

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

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