

## What You Need to Know about Life Vests for Children

### What is the law for wearing a life jacket?

State law requires all children under 12 years old to wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket while on board a vessel that is 26ft or less while underway. Also, anyone being towed behind a vessel (such as skiing) and anyone riding a personal watercraft must wear a life jacket.

### 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 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 PFDs:

**Children between birth and five years:** near or in beaches, pools, river banks, docks and in boats.

**Children between the ages of 6-11:** on docks, boats, inner tubes and river banks.

**Teens and adults:** on boats, personal watercraft and inner tubes.

### Type III Life Vest:

Type III good for calm, inland water where there is a good chance of fast rescue. Smaller sizes often have high collars to help keep a child's face out of the water. Type III Life Vests offer the most comfort and freedom of movement and come in a variety of styles and sizes, from small child through adult.

### How to Fit a Life Vest:

**A snug fit.** Check weight and size on the label and try the PFD on your child. Pick up your child by the shoulders of the PFD; the child's chin and ears won't slip through a proper fit.

**Head support for younger children.** A well designed PFD 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 vest from coming off.

**Comfort and appearance.** This is especially important for teens, who are less likely to wear a PFD.

### How Do You Use a Life Vest?

Every spring, check the life vest for fit as well as wear and tear. Throw it away if you find air leakage, mildew, rot or rust.

If a child panics in the water and thrashes about, he may turn onto his face, even though a PFD with a collar is designed to keep him on his back with face out of the water. Have your child practice wearing a life vest in the water this will help prevent panic and rolling over.

Never alter a PFD. It could lose its effectiveness.

Wear your own life vest to set an example, and to help your child if an emergency occurs.

Never use toys like plastic rings or water wings in place of a PFD.

**Remember PFDs only work when they are worn & they do not take the place of supervision!**

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