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Tips for Throwing a Safe Pool Party

Ah, summer—the season of cookouts, picnics, fireworks and, of course, pool parties. With more and more homeowners installing swimming pools for recreation and to increase the value of their residential properties, suburban neighborhoods have seen a surge in the number of backyard pools. Swimming pools often serve as the hub for birthday parties, Memorial Day gatherings, Fourth of July celebrations, Labor Day cookouts, and other summer soirees. Nothing infuses a gathering with frivolity like the sounds of splashing water, laughter, and music that mark a pool party.

Although pools have become synonymous with fun, sun, and water games, they also pose their own set of hazards. The statistics are sobering: in 2005, there were more than 3,500 pool-related drowning deaths in the United States. The risk is even higher for children—drowning is the most common cause of death for kids under five. Perhaps the most devastating aspect of these tragedies is the fact that they could easily have been prevented by utilizing proper safety procedures.

When throwing a pool party, it's critical to follow some standard rules of thumb to ensure the safety of your guests—especially when there are children present. Below, we've compiled a few recommended guidelines:

Make sure there's a phone nearby. In the event of a life-threatening emergency, every second counts. Having a point of contact within arm's reach could very well be the difference between life and death.

Make sure your backyard swimming pool is enclosed by a fence or safety barrier at least five feet high to prevent unsolicited access to your pool party. Ensure that all doors and gates leading into the pool are self-latching, and never keep them propped open for any reason.

Designated a "guard". When children are in the pool, make sure there's always an adult supervising. If there's more than one adult, they can alternate lookout shifts. Anyone who's "on duty" should refrain from consuming alcoholic beverages.

If you'll be playing any games during the pool party, hold them at a considerable distance from the water to prevent accidental falls.

Keep plenty of sunscreen, towels, and extra tee-shirts on hand to protect tender skin from getting burned by harsh UV rays.

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Anyone with a swimming pool on their premises should be fully trained in CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

Never leave a pool covering partially over the water during a pool party, as swimmers could get trapped underneath it.

Instruct swimmers to remain clear of any pool drains or filters that may pose hair-catching hazards.

Make sure that all standard rescue equipment, such as flotation devices and safety poles, are nearby during your summer party. Although these tools should be easily accessible, they shouldn't be kept in a place where children could be encouraged to use them as toys.

When serving poolside meals or drinks at your summer party, use plastic glasses and tableware rather than glass, as the latter could potentially shatter and fall into the water.

Nothing boosts the energy of a pool party like summer music, but be sure that all CD players, stereos, and other electronics are kept at a safe distance from the water to prevent electrocution.

In the event of a thunderstorm, evacuate the pool and move the party indoors.

Restrict diving to designated areas with sufficient depth and proper diving boards. Never let anyone dive off the edge of the pool or into shallow areas.

Whether you're relaxing in the backyard with a small, inflatable pool or entertaining guests on the deck of a luxurious, in-ground swimming pool, following these safety guidelines can help ensure that your summer party is as safe as it is fun.