

# 2023 Unintentional Drowning Fatalities of Children Ages 0-17

**3rd**

Leading cause of unintentional fatal injury among children ages 0 through 17 in Michigan and in the U.S. was due to accidental drowning.

**842**

U.S. children ages 0 through 17 died as a result of unintentional drowning.

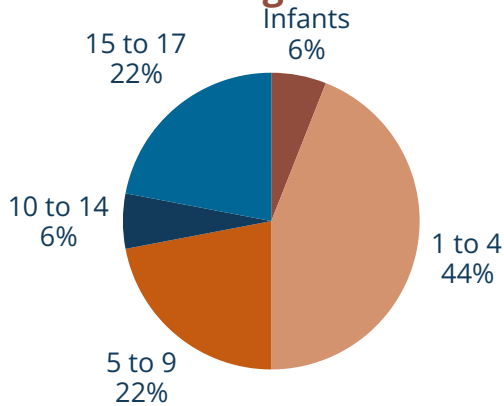
**18**

Michigan children ages 0 through 17 fatally drowned. All deaths were accidental.

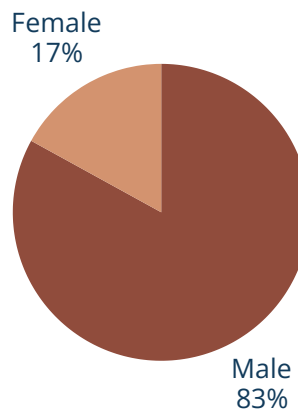
Michigan's Fatal Drowning Case Registry captures comprehensive, population-based information about all fatal drownings of Michigan resident children ages 0 through 17. For the purposes of this data brief, only accidental fatal drownings are included in the analysis. The registry aims to better understand the context and causes of fatal drownings, and to thereby address both the burden and observed disparities in drowning deaths for children across the country. By investigating these deaths more thoroughly, we hope to learn how to better prevent future drowning fatalities.

## Child's Demographic Information

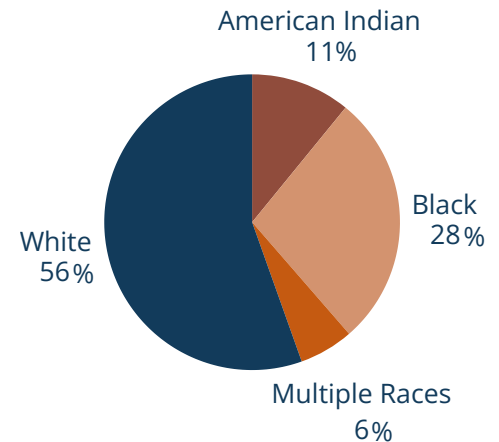
### Age



### Sex

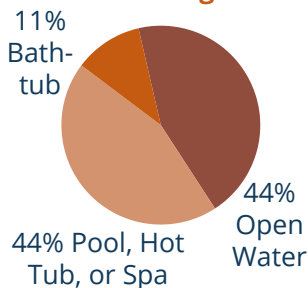


### Race



## Characteristics of Accidental Fatal Drownings

### Location of Fatal Drownings



**78%**

of children had supervision at the time of the incident (or didn't need it).

**100%**

of the children who had supervision were supervised by someone who was impaired, including by someone who was distracted.

**44%**

of the children were known to have had a prior disability or chronic illness.

## Risk and Protective Factors for Fatal Drownings in Open Water or Pools



No lifeguards were known to be present when any of the children fatally drowned in open water or a pool. Only 13% of the children were known to be able to swim.



Environmental factors, such as weather, temperature, current, a drop-off, and water clarity, were known to have contributed to 88% of the open water fatalities.



None of the children who fatally drowned in a pool were using a personal flotation device.



Barriers or protective layers, such as doors, fences, gates, and pool covers, were known to be present for 88% of the children who drowned in a pool.

# Child Death State Advisory Team Recommendations

The Michigan Child Death State Advisory Team (SAT) was established to identify and make recommendations on policy and statutory changes pertaining to child fatalities and to guide statewide prevention, education, and training efforts. The SAT reviews Michigan's child mortality data as well as local child death review team findings and recommendations to identify causes, risk factors, and trends in child deaths. The SAT offers the following recommendations to policymakers to prevent unintentional drowning deaths:

- Promote resources, such as the free [Water Safety for Parents and Caregivers](#) online course and the [Be a Water Watcher](#) initiative from the American Red Cross, which are available in multiple languages, to ensure parents and caregivers are aware of the risks of drowning, how to minimize those risks, and the importance of identifying an adult whose sole responsibility is to provide active supervision of children during any water activity.
- Encourage schools, community-based organizations, and local jurisdictions to partner with the [Great Lakes Water Safety Consortium](#) to host a variety of educational presentations from a water safety expert. Expand the reach of their piloted universal beach warning signs in English and Spanish, which include QR codes for instant access to up-to-the-minute beach hazard warnings from the [National Weather Service](#).
- Promote appropriate planning recommended by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) for families and caregivers of children with epilepsy/seizures, cardiac arrhythmias, and autism, including increased access to specialized swim lessons. For those with children who are prone to wandering, encouraging use of a [Family Wandering Emergency Plan](#) to ensure clear communication and role designation is made if the child wanders off.

## Opportunities for Prevention



Taking [swim lessons](#) from a qualified instructor until basic water competence is achieved.



Implementing additional measures to keep children with disabilities or chronic illnesses safe around water. Parents and caregivers can create a family [wandering emergency plan](#).



Installing a four-foot, four-sided isolation fence that separates both above-ground and in-ground pools from the house and the rest of the yard with a [self-closing, self-latching gate](#).



Choosing [safe places to swim](#) and learning to recognize hidden dangers, such as rip currents.



Ensuring all children and all adults wear [properly fitted life jackets approved by the U.S. Coast Guard](#) when on or in a watercraft. Air-filled swimming aids (e.g., "floaties") should not be used in place of life jackets.

### Local Initiatives:

CDR teams have implemented initiatives in their local communities to prevent unintentional drownings. **Hillsdale County** conducted a water safety campaign and held a Free Family Safety Fair where 130 free youth life vests were distributed. In **Otsego County**, the Otsego County Child Welfare Alliance also held a free youth life vest distribution event. In **Alpena County**, the City of Alpena, Alpena Fire Department IAFF Local 623, The Home Depot, and B&R Woodworks LLC established two life vest stations offering a range of life vest sizes for families to borrow while enjoying the water. At the end of the day, families simply return the vests to the station where they borrowed them. These life vest stations are located at Starlite and Thomson Park beaches.

## About This Data

The information presented in this brief is based on data gathered through Michigan's Fatal Drowning Case Registry. Michigan's Fatal Drowning Case Registry captures comprehensive, population-based information about all fatal drownings of Michigan resident children ages 0 through 17. Only data about accidental fatal drownings are included in this brief.

The National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention received funding for this initiative through the Safe States Alliance's Cooperative Agreement # 6 NU38PW000028-01 with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### References

- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics. (2025). 2023 Michigan resident death files [Unpublished raw data set].
- United States Department of Health and Human Services (US DHHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Multiple Cause of Death by Single Race 2018-2023 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released 2025. Data are compiled from data provided by the 57 vital statistics jurisdictions through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd-icd10-expanded.html>

## Contact Us

Additional CDR data, reports, and fact sheets can be found on our [website](#). Please contact the Michigan CDR Program at the Center for Child and Family Health (CCFH) at MPHI at [MichiganCDR@mphi.org](mailto:MichiganCDR@mphi.org) with any questions or requests for additional data.