



March 20, 2018

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Riverside County health official warns of spike in juvenile drownings

One child drowned after riding a toy car into a backyard pool. Another toddler was found floating in the water by a parent who thought the child was inside the home. There was the youngster who made his way into the backyard pool while family members barbecued in the front yard. Lastly, a 9-year-old girl slipped into the water while trying to fetch a tennis ball and was found after 15 minutes.

Four tragedies, four grieving families, four preventable deaths.

“Drowning is 100 percent preventable,” Kim Saruwatari, director for Riverside University Healthy System – Public Health, told Riverside County supervisors Tuesday as she described the four child drownings that have taken place so far in 2018. Saruwatari said she wanted to alert supervisors about the spike in child drownings and urge adults to take precautions.

The issue is particularly alarming, she said, because the four deaths are equal to the number of juvenile drownings for all of 2017. Each event happened with adults present, and none of the 2018 incidents occurred while the child was swimming.

Cases such as these demonstrate how important it is to monitor children anytime they are near any body of water, whether it is a backyard pool, an outdoor sauna or an indoor bathtub. One distracted moment could be all the time it takes to turn a Super Bowl party into a tragedy, she said.

“We need to be more vigilant whenever children are near water,” Saruwatari told supervisors.

The Rivco Water Safety Coalition urges all adults to keep an eye on children at all times near water with their motto of “Pay attention, drowning prevention.” Community partners have helped to increase the

availability of swimming lessons for children, and new California laws require increased safety measures around pools. Drownings are preventable so long as we remain vigilant about water safety, she said.

Saruwatari also released a video that the Health Department will distribute through social media to remind the community of the importance of taking proper precautions. Click to see video <https://vimeo.com/260283022>

To learn more about water safety, visit <http://rivcowatersafety.org/>.