

press releases



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Sun, fun, water and tragedy: Cincinnati sees its third case of diving-related paralysis during trauma-filled summer of 2005

**Neurosurgeon Charles Kuntz, IV, M.D., recommends
"no diving" into water less than 10-12 feet deep**

CINCINNATI- A Mayfield Clinic neurosurgeon on Friday issued a strong reminder to teenagers and parents that diving into water can result in devastating and irreversible injuries to the spinal cord.

Charles Kuntz IV, M.D., an associate professor of neurosurgery at UC, said three Greater Cincinnati residents have been paralyzed this summer after diving into swimming pools and striking their heads on the bottom. The three individuals who suffered paralyzing spinal cord injuries by shallow-water dives have been treated at University Hospital and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

Spinal cord injury occurs when the spinal cord, a bundle of nerves that runs down the back from the base of the brain to the waist, is damaged or severed by trauma. This can occur during a dive into shallow water if the diver's head strikes the bottom, causing the vertebrae that encircle the spinal cord to collapse. If the spinal cord is damaged and it is unable to transmit nerve impulses to and from the brain, paralysis occurs.

"Witnessing a life-altering injury of this kind is probably the most tragic and preventable event I see," said Dr. Kuntz. "With one unfortunate decision, the life of a healthy young person is utterly transformed. The individual is likely to be dependent on machines for the rest of his or her life."

Dr. Kuntz urged parents, teachers, camp counselors, and coaches to impress upon young people the hazards of diving into shallow water. Dr. Kuntz believes that diving should be performed in water that is 10 to 12 feet or more in depth. Swimmers and divers should enter the water feet first to determine depth.

According to the Foundation for Aquatic Injury Prevention, "Very few people know that they can in fact break their neck and/or suffer spinal cord injury from diving into water five feet deep or less. Many people know they can hit the bottom and, in fact, have done so, but most of them have never suffered injury and, in fact, many of them will not believe that they can suffer such an injury."

The ThinkFirst National Injury Prevention Foundation warns against diving into water less than 9 feet deep and urges swimmers never to dive into an above-ground pool.

The Foundation for Spinal Cord Injury Prevention, Care & Cure estimates that about 11,000 new spinal cord injuries result each year, about 40 cases for every million people living in the United States. More than 1,000 of these cases result from diving accidents, according to the Foundation for Aquatic Injury Prevention. Motor vehicle crashes, falls, sports, and violence are other primary causes. An estimated 250,000 Americans are currently living with spinal cord injury.

Spinal cord injuries have profound human and financial costs. While the lifetime medical expenses for a person paralyzed from the neck down can reach \$2 million, it is the patient's tragic, life-altering paralysis that is most devastating. Dr. Kuntz said, "If with this message I can save one child from this devastating injury, then I have won."

For additional information about preventing traumatic brain and spinal injuries, visit the ThinkFirst National Injury Prevention Foundation at <http://www.thinkfirst.org/home.asp>.

To view ThinkFirst's list of facts and safety tips relating to a variety of activities, from swimming to riding bicycles, go to: <http://www.thinkfirst.org/About/Facts.asp>.

For information about the Foundation for Aquatic Injury Prevention, go to: <http://aquaticisf.org>.

Mayfield Clinic is recognized as one of the nation's leading physician organizations for clinical care, education, and research of the spine and brain. Mayfield, which is affiliated with the UC Department of Neurosurgery, includes 18 neurosurgeons and treats 20,000 patients from 35 states and a dozen countries in a typical year. Mayfield's neurosurgeons are active participants in important clinical trials and have pioneered surgical procedures and instrumentation that have revolutionized the medical art of neurosurgery for brain tumors and neurovascular diseases and disorders.