

Childhood Drowning

Drowning: the statistics

Drowning is the most common cause of accidental death in Australian children aged between 0-4 years. An international comparison of drowning rates indicates that Australia has the second worst record in the world for toddler drowning.

Kidsafe conducted a study of child drowning in WA between 1987 and 1996:

- There was a yearly average of 7.9 drowning in children aged 0-4 years.
- 41% of drowning cases occur in children aged between 12-23 months.
- Infants under 1 most frequently drowned in baths or buckets.
- 41% of drownings occur in summer.
- The majority (61%) of swimming pool deaths occur in backyard swimming pools.

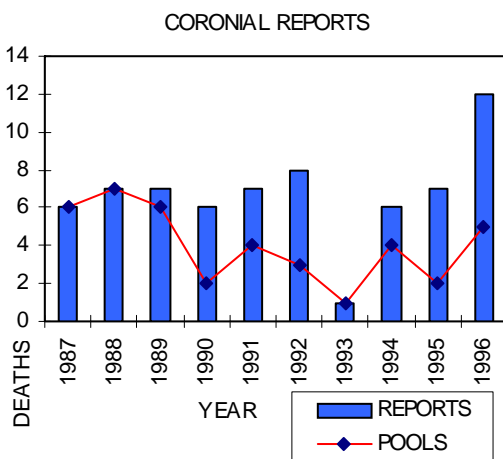


Note: The in the graph below the dramatic drop in drowning incidents in 1993 following the 1992 introduction of mandatory isolation fencing for all new backyard swimming pools. In 1993 the legislation was retracted.

Toddler Drowning in 2003:

- 24% of all drowning deaths in Western Australia.
- Barrier deficiencies in 4 of the 7 cases of home swimming pool drowning.
- There was 1 case each for drowning in a bath, nappy bucket and river in children under 5 years.
- A lapse in or absence of parental supervision was apparent in all but one case.

(Source: Royal Lifesaving Society of Australia (WA Branch) 2003 Western Australia Drowning Report)



How Drowning can happen:

Collections of water such as swimming pools, bathtubs, ponds, buckets, dams, rivers, lakes, oceans, tanks, are all potential drowning hazards for children.

Water based activities are part of the Australian lifestyle.

Children are naturally attracted to water; they have little fear and no understanding or awareness of the danger.

A child can drown silently in less than two minutes.

Children under 2 years can topple easily into water hazards as their heads are heavier than the rest of their body.

There is insufficient evidence to suggest that a child under the age of three years can develop adequate swimming skills to prevent drowning.

A child can drown in 5 cm of water

77% of drowning reports state that the child was clothed at the time of immersion therefore water activity was not intended.

Sometimes parents and carers have unrealistic expectations that children would obey instructions and stay away from water hazards.

Sometimes parents and carers mistakenly believe that a child can safely be left unattended for short periods of time.

Most studies reveal a direct lack of adult supervision.

Parents and carers often believed that they had adequate safety measures in place.

Where children drown in a fully fenced pool, the barrier is usually found to be faulty, non-compliant or the gate has been propped open.

Parents and carers mistakenly believe that a younger child can safely play or be in the care of older children.

Priorities for prevention of childhood drowning

Keep Watch

Supervise

Constant adult supervision and ensuring your child is within arms reach, not occasionally glancing at your child while you read or snooze.

For example: If you are holding a pool party, or there is a large group of people swimming, allocate one or two people to be the "life guard" for 20 minutes at a time.

This person does not join in conversations, prepare drinks or food as they are totally dedicated to watching everyone in the pool.

Swap "life guards" regularly so everyone can enjoy the day.

Fence your swimming pool.

Seventy five percent (75%) of swimming pool drownings could have been prevented had isolation fencing and functioning gates been in place. Install an isolation fence that meets Australian Standards AS 1926 (2000):

- Fences must be 1.2 metres high.
- The gap under the fence 100mm or less from the ground to prevent a child from crawling underneath.
- The vertical bars should be closer than 100mm so a child cannot slip between them.

In 2005 these standards were up for review. To find out the latest requirements visit:

www.poolsafety.com.au

Once a fence and self-closing gate are installed, they must be kept in good working order.

- Check that your gate latches are working properly.
- Remove anything that could help a child climb over a fence.

Always shut gate and never prop it open



Legislation

A Safety Barrier is required for all below ground pools and spas containing water to a depth greater than 300mm.

The date your local government approved the Building Licence for your pool determines where your pool barrier must be located.

Category A: (All new pools since 4th Nov 2004)

- Restrict access to the pool or spa from outside the property through the installation and maintenance of boundary/dividing fences and gates.
- Install a suitable barrier that separates the pool or spa from any buildings that are on the same property, a wall may form part of the barrier.
- Not include as part of the barrier any wall that contains a door unless this door is permanently sealed.
- Ensure that windows that are contained within a wall that forms part of the barrier comply with the requirements of AS 1936.1.
- Ensure that gates that form part of the barrier open away from the pool/spa.

Category B: (1 July 1992 to 4 November 2001)

- Restrict access to the pool or spa from outside the property through the installation and maintenance of suitable barrier(s). Minimally these barriers include boundary/dividing fences and gates.
- Ensure that gates that form part of the barrier open away from the pool/spa. Restrict access to the pool or spa through the provision of a suitable barrier between any building on the property and the pool/spa.

The barrier may consist of:

- A barrier and gate that complies with AS1926.1;
or
- The doors and windows that provide access to pool area may become part of the barrier if they meet section 2 of AS1926.1

Owners of pools built prior to 30th June 1992 have until December 2006 to bring their pool up to the minimum barrier requirements identified in Category B.

However if you purchase a property with a pool built prior to 30th June 1992 you have only 3 months from the date of settlement to make the necessary upgrade. For the latest information or more detail visit: www.poolsafety.com.au or contact your Local Government Authority.

Water Skills

Familiarise your children with water start swimming classes or aqua start program. Water familiarisation skills are an important start to a child's life around water but they will not make the child drown-proof.

Learn Resuscitation

The first few minutes in an emergency are vital and can make a difference between life and death. In many rural areas, help may be miles away- it may be up to you.

- Learn CPR (cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) and update your training regularly.
- Keep CPR instructions on the pool fence and in first aid kit.
- Keep emergency numbers by the phone or two-way radio or program them into the phone.

CPR posters and training are available from your local:

- **Royal Life Saving Society**
- **St John Ambulance**
- **Surf Life Saving Association**
- **Red Cross**

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For more information ☎ (08) 9340 8509

Child Safety Information Line ☎ 1800 802 244

Poisons Information Centre ☎ 13 11 26

www.kidsafewa.com.au

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