



Water Safety

Drowning is the most common cause of preventable death for Australian children aged between 0 to 4 years.

Toddler drowning 2003-2013

- 40 children under five years of age drowned
- 326 children were hospitalised
- Males are twice as likely to drown
- 90% of fatal incidents occurred in and around the home
- 40% occurred in a home swimming pool
- Bath tubs and fishponds were the other most common locations
- Children under 2 were most at risk

(Source: *A 10 year analysis of drowning in toddlers aged 0-4 years in Western Australia: 2003/04–2012/13* Royal Life Saving Society of Western Australia)

How drowning happens

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 its danger.

A child can drown in less than 2 minutes in as little as 5 cm of water in absolute silence.

Water contained in swimming pools, bathtubs, ponds, buckets, dams, rivers, lakes, oceans and water tanks are all potential drowning hazards for children.

Parents and carers often mistakenly believe that:

- Children will follow instructions and stay away from water hazards
- That a child can safely be left unattended for short periods of time
- They have adequate safety measures in place
- Younger children can safely play or be in the care of older children

Most studies reveal an absence of direct adult supervision was one of the main causes in a drowning.

Where children drown in a fully fenced pool, the barrier is usually found to be:

- Faulty
- Non-compliant or
- Misused – e.g. propping open the gate

Keep Watch

Keep Watch is a health promotion program run by the Royal Life Saving Society WA targeting the prevention of toddler drowning. For further information on preventing childhood drowning visit:

www.royallifesavingwa.com.au

Keep Watch's four key messages to prevent toddler drowning deaths are:

1. Supervision

Around any depth of water children should be supervised by an adult. Supervision should be constant, active and "within arm's reach" of your child, not an occasional glance between reading or doing chores.

Designate an adult to be the 'life guard' when there are a number of adults or at family gatherings. Ensure someone is responsible for the active supervision of children around water and everyone knows who it is.



2. Restrict access

One of the most effective ways to prevent drowning is to place a barrier between your child and the water body. Barriers must be checked on a regular basis to ensure they are working properly.

Sometimes it is not possible or practical to have a barrier around the water; in these situations alternative ways to limit a child's access to water hazards should be considered.

- Create a 'safe play area' on farms; a fenced area, to separate the child from the workplace or water hazards.
- Put strong mesh over ponds and pooled water in



- water features – strong enough to take a child's weight.
- Close doors to bathrooms and empty paddling pools, baths and buckets immediately after use.
- Set rules for your family when near water.
- For home swimming pools and spas, the best option is to install isolation barriers with a well-maintained self-closing and self-latching gate.

Fencing your swimming pool

Western Australia has very strict pool fencing legislation and this has been one of the contributing factors for the reduction in the rate of child drowning incidences.

Pool barriers must meet Australian Standards (AS 1926: 2012):

- Barriers must be at least 1.2 metres high.
- Gaps under the fence must be 100mm or less to prevent a child from crawling underneath.
- Vertical bars should be 100mm or less apart so a child cannot slip between them.

Once a barrier with a self-closing, self-latching gate is installed, it 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.
- Never prop a pool gate open

Legislation

A barrier is required for all pools and spas containing water to a depth equal to or greater than 300mm, this includes above ground and inflatable pools. The date your local government approved the Building Licence for your pool determines where your pool barrier must be located.

For information on the type of barrier required for your home pool visit [Rules for pools and spas](#) or contact your Local Government Authority.

Royal Life Saving Society WA conducts a number of programs and activities on water safety for children and adults including First Aid Courses.

Visit www.royallifesavingwa.com.au for more information.

3. Teaching Water Skills

Familiarise your children with water through swimming classes or an infant aquatic program. Water familiarisation skills are an important start to a child's life around water but remember that they are not "drown-proof" children.

4. Respond in an Emergency

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

- If children are missing always look around water first
- Learn CPR and update your training regularly.
- Keep CPR instructions on the pool fence and in your First Aid Kit.
- Keep emergency numbers by the phone or two-way radio or program them into your phone.

CPR posters and training are available from your local:

- Royal Life Saving Society
- St John Ambulance
- Red Cross



Kidsafe WA

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For more information (08) 9340 8509
Child Safety Information Line 1800 802 244
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