

## fact sheet

### The Facts\*

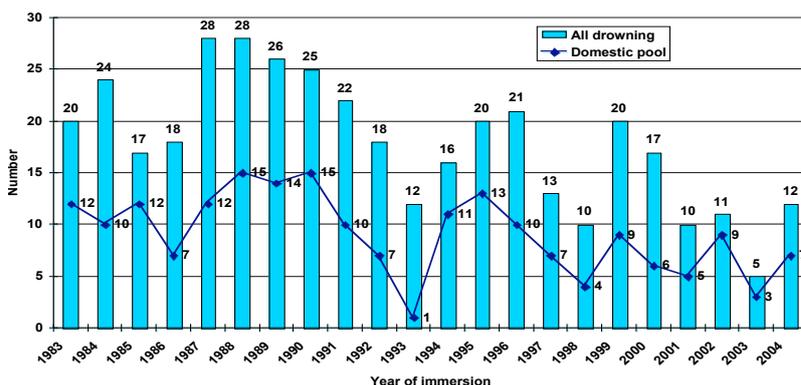
Drowning is the most common cause of accidental death in Australian children aged between 0-4 years. An international comparison of drowning rates indicates that Australia has the second worst record in the world for toddler drowning. Between 1992 and 2004, 183 children aged 4 and under drowned in Queensland. Almost half of these (49%) were in a domestic pool. 15% were in the bath.

- On average, 14 children aged 0-4 years drown in QLD each year.
- Two thirds of these drowning cases occur in children aged between one and two years of age.
- Infants under 1 most frequently drowned in baths or buckets.
- For every toddler drowning, 3 or 4 others are admitted to hospital following an immersion incident. These children are at risk of brain damage from lack of oxygen.

### Pool Drownings

- 73% of toddler pool drownings involve in-ground pools, 4% spas, 23% above ground pools.
- Two thirds of drownings occurred in the child's own residence. Most of the remainder occurred while visiting the pool owner
- More than 80% of children who drowned had gained easy access to the pool
  - 46% gate propped open or gate did not close automatically
  - 21 % unfenced
  - 13% via house window or door
  - 8% were in the pool area
  - 4% got under the fence
  - The remainder were unclear as to how they gained access

Drowning deaths children 0-4 years, Queensland - 1983-2004



### 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. Children have even drowned in eskies when the ice has melted.

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

1. Keep Watch – Supervise
2. Fence your pool correctly
3. Teach your child water skills
4. Learn resuscitation





### Keep Watch -Supervise

Constant adult supervision of your child near water is essential, not occasionally glancing at your child while you read or snooze. Your child should be within arms reach while you watch.

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

To prevent toddler drownings Kidsafe recommends the following minimum strategies:

- **An isolation fence around all four sides of the pool which prevents access from the house to the pool**
- **A fence that is at least 1200mm in height constructed so that it inhibits access by young children to the pool**
- **A gate that is self-closing and self-latching which is regularly maintained and never left propped open.**
- **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.**
- **Removal of anything that could help a child climb over the fence.**



There now are stringent guidelines which cover new pool fencing requirements. For up to date information on pool fencing requirements in Queensland visit [www.poolfencing.qld.gov.au](http://www.poolfencing.qld.gov.au) or contact your local council.

Remember that a swimming pool is an excavation or structure capable of being filled with water to a depth of 300 mm or more, and intended for human aquatic activity even if not being currently used as such. This includes spas and children's wading pools.

### 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 first aid training (including CPR) are available from your local:

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

Local branches of these operations are listed in the white pages of your telephone directory.

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