

Know · Learn · Connect

'Keep Watch' Drowning Prevention



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Organisations working to prevent toddler drowning

Royal Life Saving Society WA

The Royal Life Saving Society WA is a not-for profit organisation, serving the community as the largest provider of water safety education in WA.

Royal Life Saving Society WA provides the Keep Watch program, which aims to reduce the incidence of toddler drowning in the community. The Keep Watch program has four key toddler drowning prevention messages, including, supervise children within arm's reach, prevent access to water, familiarise children with water and learn how to resuscitate.

Originally conceived in 1996 as solely a mass media campaign, the program now has additional strategies to strengthen, influence and to ensure that it reaches parents effectively. Some of these strategies include;

- [Educational and promotional materials](#)
- [Parent education sessions](#) for parents and carers of children aged 0-4 years throughout WA
- [Professional development presentations](#) for staff who play a role in promoting child safety
- [Heart Beat Club training courses](#) to develop the life saving skills of the community
- [Infant Aquatics lessons](#) to develop children's aquatic skills.



Kidsafe WA

Kidsafe WA is the leading independent not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting safety and preventing childhood injuries and accidents in Western Australia. Kidsafe WA work in the community to educate and inform parents and children on staying safe at home, at play and on the road.

Given the incidence of drowning among children, Kidsafe WA provide resources and education about keeping children safe around water. The online safety demonstration house also provides an interactive portal for parents and carers of children to learn about safety around the home, including water safety.

Additional Background Information

What is drowning?

Drowning is the experience of respiratory impairment or suffocation, due to submersion in some form of liquid(1).

Why is toddler drowning an issue?

In Australia, drowning is the leading cause of preventable death in children(2). Young children are at heightened risk of drowning as they have low swimming ability, minimal awareness of water dangers, are relatively immobile and are entirely dependent on their caregivers(3).

This increased risk amongst toddlers is evident in WA drowning fatalities, between 1 July 2003 and 30 June 2013, toddlers were hospitalised at seven times the rate of any other age group in WA(2). During this period, 40 toddlers drowned in WA and 326 were hospitalised following a non-fatal drowning incident(2). This equates to a yearly average of four fatal toddler drownings and 33 hospitalisations, with an average length of stay in hospital of 5.2 days(2).

Similar to overall drowning rates, males experience higher rates of toddler drowning than females. In WA between 1 July 2003 and 30 June 2013, males were 1.9 times more likely to drown and 1.5 times more likely to be hospitalised following a non-fatal drowning incident than females(2). Aboriginal children were also over-represented in toddler drowning rates in WA from 2003-2013, with 20% (n=8) of fatalities in toddlers involving Aboriginal toddlers despite making up 3.15% of the population aged 0-4 years(2).

Prevention of drowning in the home environment needs particular attention, in WA between 2003 and 2013, 90% of drowning deaths and 73% of hospitalisations followed a drowning incident in toddlers aged 0-4 years that occurred in and around the home(2). Of all toddler drowning fatalities, 40% occurred in a home swimming pool(2).

A recent report into the incidence and costs of injury in WA highlighted that in 2012 drowning fatalities and hospitalisations had the highest mean cost at \$1,272,144 of all injury areas(4). This includes costs associated with presentations at emergency departments, hospital admissions, care aids, emergency transport and indirect costs such as long-term care, loss of paid productivity and quality of life lost. In addition to this, the report noted that the incidence of drowning fatalities and hospitalisations in WA had increased from 89 incidences in 2003 to 128 in 2012(4).

When a non-fatal drowning occurs the individual may be not experience any immediate physical injuries, however they may experience brain damage, organ damage or long-term psychological trauma(5). Therefore, life-long physical and psychological factors from the incident can affect the individual, as well as family and friends (6).

Drowning prevention strategies

Toddler drowning incidents can occur due to a range of circumstances. Fortunately, many drowning incidents can be prevented by always keeping watch of children in and around water, preventing children's access to water, teaching children to be water confident and learning CPR.

In all drowning fatalities and hospitalisations among toddlers in WA in 2003-2013, it was recorded that there was a lack of adult supervision(2). Supervision is the key Keep Watch message as it is the best way to support child safety around the water. In order to effectively supervise children around water, an adult should be within arm's reach, engaged and interacting with the child at all times(7).

In WA there are more than 170,000 home swimming pools(8). Due to the increased risk associated with home pools, it is vital that pool owners understand the importance of ensuring their pool meets the relevant regulations. All private swimming and spa pools in WA, which contain water more than 300mm deep, must have a compliant barrier installed that restricts access to the pool(9). It is also important that barriers installed are used correctly, as 62.5% of swimming pool drowning incidents that occurred in WA from 2003 to 2013, the barrier was ineffective due to the gate being propped open, not self-closing/self-latching, or the toddler gained entrance underneath the fence(2). [The Royal Life Saving Society's checklist for pool barriers](#) outlines the key safety features of a pool barrier and supports pool owners to inspect barrier performance(10).

WA's warm weather climate results in water-based activities being a large part of our culture. Water familiarisation from an early age can increase a child's safety when participating in these activities as it can increase the child's swimming ability, confidence and survival skills(2). A child with strong swimming ability does not 'drown-proof' the child; therefore, adults should always actively supervise children around water.

Early CPR has proven to contribute to an increased chance of survival in child drowning cases and every moment counts(2). As parents and caregivers are often the first person to respond to a toddler drowning incident it is important that they have up to date CPR and first aid skills to ensure that they can respond appropriately in an emergency situation(2).

Injury Matters

Injury Matters aims to empower, influence and collaborate with the WA community to prevent injury and support recovery, because it believes all West Australians can live life uninterrupted by injury.

Know Injury

Know Injury provides knowledge, training, resources, and networking opportunities aimed at preventing injuries in Western Australia. To do this, Know Injury works with Local Governments, health workers, not-for-profit and community organisations to Know, Learn and Connect:

- **Know** about when, where, why and to whom injuries occur
- **Learn** how to adopt a public health approach to preventing injuries
- **Connect** with other people and organisations working to prevent injuries in Western Australia

Know Injury is provided by Injury Matters and funded by the State Government through the Department of Health.