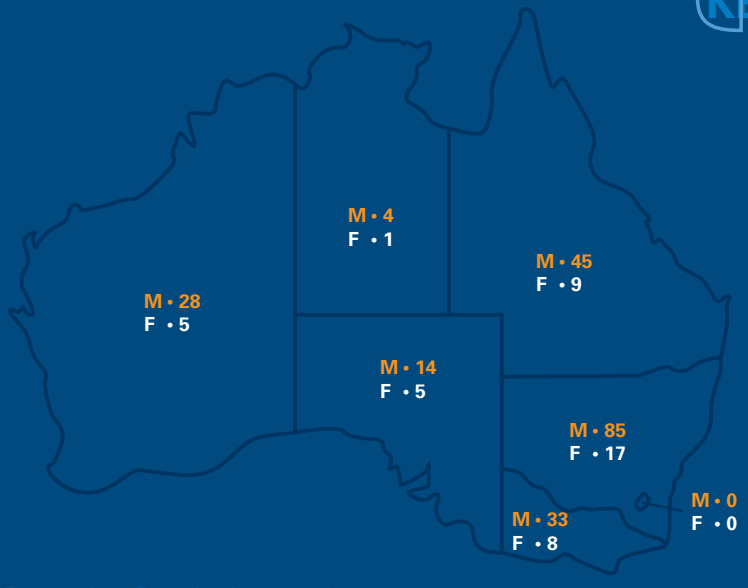
the national drowning report

06

EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER

Total Number of Drowning Deaths Per State



Drowning Deaths by gender

M • Male Drowning F • Female Drowning

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Royal Life Saving

THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY AUSTRALIA

how many people drowned in 2005/06?

265 people drowned in Australian waterways between 1 July 2005 and 30 June 2006. This figure is an increase of 6 on last year's figure, but represents a decrease of 9 when compared to the 5 year average. The drowning rate per 100,000 people decreased from the 5 year average of 1.40 to 1.29, a decrease of 8% (Figure 1).

zero drowning challenge

Every year Royal Life Saving issues the 'Zero Drowning Challenge'. Each year we work towards preventing all drowning deaths in Australia by implementing a range of programs and promoting safe aquatic environments for all to enjoy.

This year we have launched the 'Everyone Can Be A Lifesaver' campaign. This campaign recognises that all community members can impact on the reduction in drowning deaths. Royal Life Saving is dedicated to turning everyday people into everyday community lifesavers through education, training, health promotion, risk management, advocacy, sport and participation, and research.

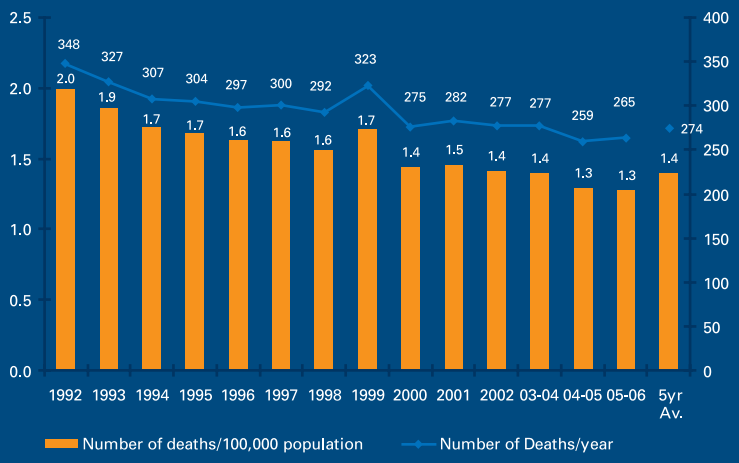
Building a community that embraces a few simple water safety rules, possesses knowledge and skills that emphasise safe aquatic recreation, and is constantly alert when in, on or around water, can achieve zero drowning deaths.

tip: rock fishing

Rock fishing claimed ten lives last year. Acknowledged as a dangerous activity, there are a number of strategies you can put in place to prevent yourself or others from drowning whilst rock fishing.

- Before approaching the rock shelf watch the water and find the safest place to fish
- Take a mate or two fishing with you so that if one of you gets into trouble the other can call for help
- Wear appropriate footwear, clothing (including a PFD – life jacket), and head protection
- Take a float and line in case someone is washed in.

Figure 1. Unintentional Drowning Deaths and Death Rates. Australia 1992-2005/06



8% decrease in drowning rate

methods

Information for the National Drowning Report 2006 is collected by Royal Life Saving Society Branches and analysed by the National Office. Information is collected from State and Territory Coronial Offices, the National Coroners Information System (NCIS) and media reports. Searches of the NCIS are conducted based on:

1. Mechanism – Threats to Breathing – Drowning and Immersion
2. Key Words 'drown' and 'immersion' are searched for in Findings
3. Key Words 'drown' and 'immersion' are searched for in Police Reports
4. Key Words 'drown' and 'immersion' are searched for in Autopsy Reports
5. Aquatic Location

Royal Life Saving uses a media monitoring service (both electronic and print all year round) to find drowning deaths reported in the media. This service uses the key words; drown, drowning, water safety, water rescue, keep watch, and life saving.

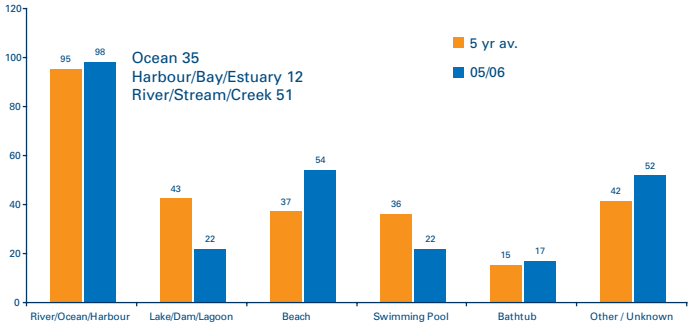
All care is taken to ensure that the information is as accurate as possible. However, these figures should be considered interim until the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) releases its 'causes of death' figures for the year 2006. These figures may change depending upon ongoing coronial investigations and findings. The report contains drowning deaths known as at 31 August 2006, any cases identified after this date are not included.The 5 year average figures are based on information provided by the ABS for the financial year 2000/01 (which includes 'Accidental Drowning', 'Water Transport Drowning' and 'Drowning due to Cataclysmic Events') and from Royal Life Saving National Drowning Reports from the years 2002 to 2005. Information does not include suicide, homicide, natural death (such as cardiac arrest), shark and crocodile attack, or hypothermia where known.

Due to ABS coding changes different sources have been used to calculate the 5 year average. The 5 year average for location and activity is 268, whereas the overall 5 year average is 274. The age group for young children has changed to 0-4 years (previously it was 0-5 years).The 'swimming' category has changed to 'swimming and leisure activity' due to the way information is coded by the NCIS. 'River' in the river/ ocean/harbour category includes rivers, creeks and streams. 'Lake/Dam/Lagoon' includes static inland water areas (i.e. do not flow). The 'Other' category in locations this year includes: irrigation channels, fish ponds, rock ledges, and water tanks.

where are people drowning?

The great news is there has been a 39% reduction in drowning deaths at Swimming Pools (against the 5 year average). However drowning deaths at rivers/oceans/harbours and beaches are up on the 5 year average (Figure 2). Drowning deaths at lake/dam/lagoon locations are down by 48% on the 5 year average. The most common activity at lakes/dams/lagoons prior to drowning was walking or playing near the water (fell-in). Drowning deaths at river/ocean/harbour locations is up by 3% on the 5 year average. Common activities at river/ocean/harbour locations were using watercraft, recreating near water (fell-in) and swimming / leisure activities.

Figure 2. Drowning Deaths by Location, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2005/06



tip: bronze medallion

If you are a person who spends a lot time participating in aquatic recreation activity or want to know more about water safety, you should consider doing a Bronze Medallion. The Bronze Medallion Award gives you the skills and knowledge to prevent or respond to aquatic emergencies.

For more information contact your local Royal Life Saving office or visit www.bronzerescue.com.au

tip: attempting a rescue

Three people this year drowned while attempting to save someone else. When attempting a rescue Royal Life Saving recommends that no attempt be undertaken unless it is absolutely safe to do so. First talk, then reach or throw something like a rope or buoyant object. If safe, a wade and row rescue can be attempted. As a last resort, and only if trained and physically able, attempt a swimming rescue using a rescue device or improvised buoyant aid.

rural drowning deaths

Approximately one third (29%) of all drowning deaths this year occurred away from the coast in rural areas. The flat, calm appearance of lakes and rivers often gives the false appearance of tranquillity and safety.

When swimming in rural locations always take a friend, and check for hidden hazards and the water's depth before entering.

For more information about how to prevent drowning deaths, please visit the Royal Life Saving website www.royallifesaving.com.au and look at our fact sheets.

beach drowning deaths

Drowning deaths at beaches are up by ten deaths on last year. The most common activities people were undertaking prior to drowning at a beach were fishing or swimming/leisure activities. When swimming at a beach always swim in a patrolled area between the red and yellow flags.

- Always swim with a friend.
- Wear the appropriate safety gear when fishing, like lightweight clothing and personal floatation devices (PFD); the majority of people who drown while fishing were not expecting to end up in the water.

how many people drowned in each state and territory?

There has been a reduction in drowning deaths in NSW, Victoria and the ACT, with ACT having zero unintentional drowning deaths. Unfortunately all other State and Territories have recorded an increase.

Preventing drowning deaths is not an easy job. People drown in a variety of locations whilst undertaking a range of activities. There are however many strategies that can be implemented to help prevent drowning deaths.

Some of these strategies are featured throughout the National Drowning Report.

Others strategies in preventing drowning deaths can be found at www.royallifesaving.com.au

tip: driving on flooded roads

Royal Life Saving does not recommend driving through flooded roadways. Last year there were ten people who drowned while attempting to transverse a flooded roadway. A few tips for driving in areas with water over the roads:

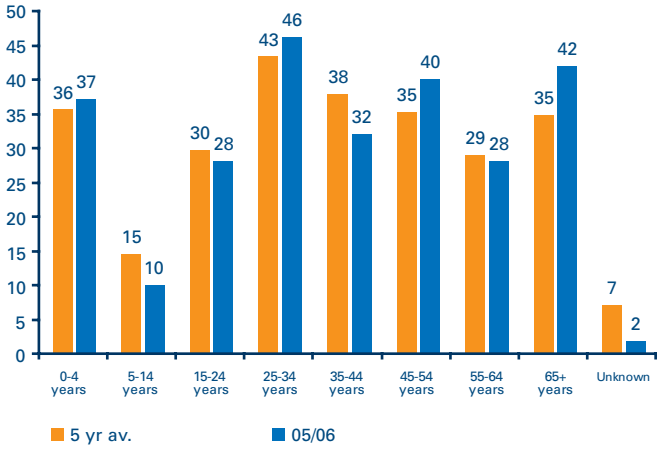
- Where possible know your local conditions and try to avoid roads prone to flooding during wet conditions
- If there has been rain, listen to local radio for updates to see if there is any localised flooding
- In some areas of Australia roads will become flooded due to water flow, keep an eye out for flood warning signs
- If there is water across the road, check the level and speed of the water before entry. Also check to ensure the road has not been washed away
- Crossing flooded bridges and causeways is dangerous and should not be attempted.

who drowns in australia?

Last year 220 (83%) males and 45 (17%) females drowned, making males more than four times more likely to drown than females. Drowning numbers are down only slightly (3.3%) compared to the 5 year average. There are however, a number of age groups which have increased on the 5 year average. These are; 0-4 years by +4%, 25-34 years by +6%, 45-54 years by +14% and the 65+ years age group by +21%. (Figure 3)

After an increase in the 6-14 years age group in the previous years National Drowning Report it is pleasing to see a 32% reduction in the 5-14 years age group on the 5 year average. This figure is down by eight drowning deaths (44%) from last year (this is in spite of the inclusion of the 5 year age group in the category, see methods). There is still much work to be done to achieve zero drowning deaths in this age group. All children can work towards becoming everyday community lifesavers by learning water safety skills through the Royal Life Saving 'Swim and Survive' program. This program helps children aged 5-14 years learn personal aquatic survival, swimming and water safety skills. Swim and Survive provides a broad, balanced program of swimming, water safety and survival skills. It develops; swimming technique, water safety, water confidence, endurance, survival and rescue skills.

Figure 3. Drowning Deaths by Age Group, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2005/06

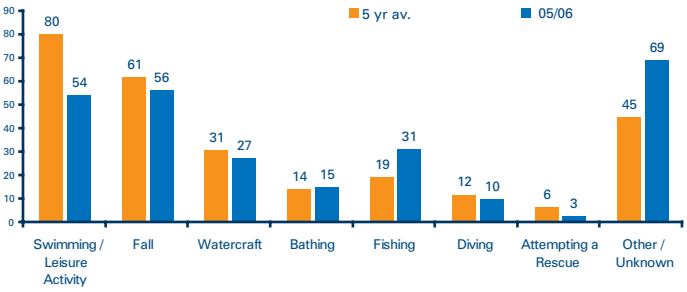


To find out more about Swim and Survive visit www.swimandsurvive.com.au

what activities were people undertaking prior to drowning?

Of the seven activities identified, drowning deaths resulting from swimming / leisure activities, falling into water, watercraft, diving and attempting a rescue were down compared to the 5 year average. Drowning while fishing, this includes from rocks, boats, the beach, jetties and rivers was up by 60% compared to the 5 year average. Drowning while bathing was slightly up (6%) on the 5 year average (Figure 4). The use of the National Coroners Information System improves case ascertainment but increases the number of cases where information is not available; this is reflected in the large number of other / unknown cases.

Figure 4. Drowning Deaths by Activity, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2005/06



what did drowning cost australia last year?

While every life is precious, consideration of the economic costs of drowning is important. There have been three major studies in Australia examining the lifetime costs of drowning deaths.

Theses studies show the lifetime cost per drowning death ranges between $370,000 and $610,467. With 265 drowning deaths in 2005/06 the lifetime cost to the Australian economy is between $97.3 and $160.6 million. The good news is that 83 lives were saved last year compared to the peak in 1992 (348 drowning deaths – Figure 1) due to water safety programs. This equates to a lifetime saving of between $30.7 and $50.7 million from last year.

tip: swim with a friend

When going for a swim: always swim with a friend, check the water before you enter, be aware of the people and the environment around you, and always take care.

tip: picnic near water

When going for a picnic near water, when you first arrive take the children to the water location and explain the rules first, go for a swim and then unpack the car. This ensures that both you and the children are familiar with the water environment. Some rules that should be considered are: never swim without an adult present, always enter the water slowly, feet first while checking for submerged objects and how fast the water is flowing.

children: 0-4 years age

KEEP WATCH

PREVENT YOUR CHILD FROM DROWNING

how many young children drowned?

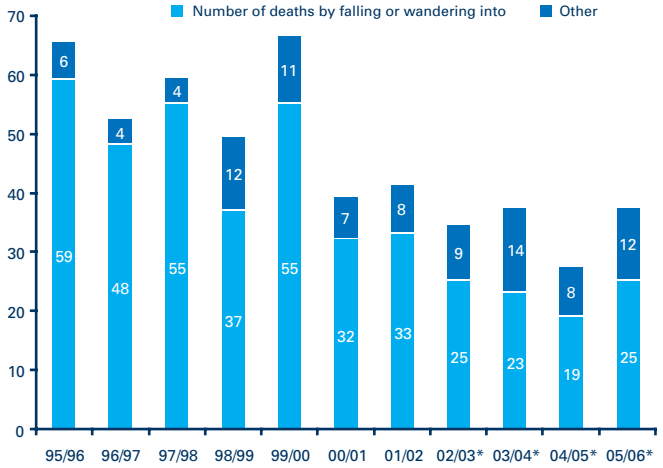
37 young children drowned in 2005/06 (Figure 5), which is a 4% increase (36 to 37) on the 5 year average (Figure 3). While 37 deaths are far too many, the good news is that this result represents a reduction of 44% (66 to 37) in drowning deaths from its recent peak in 1999/2000.

Drowning deaths of young children continues to be a major issue for drowning prevention in Australia. The message from Royal Life Saving is KEEP WATCH.

- Young children need to be supervised constantly (within arms' reach) whenever they are in, on or near water.
- Restricting a young child's access to water either by putting a barrier around the water or around the child is also effective in preventing drowning deaths.
- Undertaking water familiarisation with your child will help you to become aware of the dangers.
- Learning resuscitation can help if an incident does occur.

For more information please visit www.keepwatch.com.au

Figure 5. Drowning Deaths of Young Children 0-4 years, Australia 1995/96 – 2005/06 *National Drowning Report Figures



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tip: backyard pools

While drowning deaths of young children in swimming pools are down by 13% on the 5 year average it is still the most common location where children drown. Young children are the most vulnerable when it comes to drowning at home, this is reflected in the large number of drowning deaths in swimming pools and bathtubs. Swimming pool drowning deaths in young children are preventable by following some simple rules:

- Ensure that the gate is closed at all times.
- Never prop the gate open for any reason at any time.
- If the child is in the pool area, supervise them at all times. This means being within arms' reach.
- Prepare a pool bag that contains everything you need for the pool so that you do not need to leave.
- Ensure there is nothing close to the pool fence that can be used by the child to climb over.

where and how did they drown?

The majority of drowning deaths of young children resulted from the child falling or wandering into the water (Figure 5). The swimming pool was the most common location, with the majority of young children falling or wandering into a backyard pool.

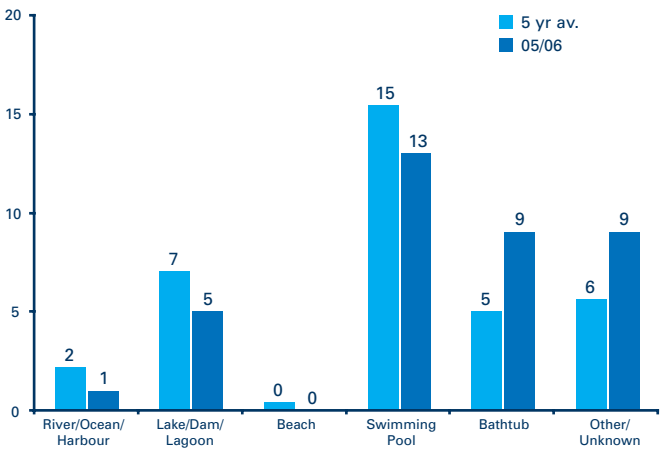
The second most common location of drowning deaths of young children this year was bathtubs and all bar one of these were bathing prior to drowning.

All young children should be supervised (i.e. be within arms' reach) at all times when in, on or around water.

If you need to leave the bathroom take the child with you. Baby bath aids are not a substitute for supervision and in 2005 the Australian Government introduced a mandatory standard requiring all baby bath aids to carry a warning about drowning and a reminder that children should be supervised at all times.

Visit www.keepwatch.com.au for more information about how to keep your child safe around water.

Figure 6. Location of Drowning Death, Young Children 0-4 years, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2005/06



quick facts

Young Children 0-4 Years

- 37 young children 0-4 years drowned last year (14% of all drowning deaths)
- 24 (65%) were males
- 13 (35%) drowned in swimming pools
- 9 (24%) drowned in bathtubs
- 25 (68%) fell or wandered into water prior to drowning

Children 5-14 years

- 10 children 5-14 years drowned last year (4% of all drowning deaths)
- 6 (60%) were males
- 5 (50%) drowned in rivers/oceans/harbours

People 15-34 Years

- 74 people 15-34 years drowned last year (28% of all drowning deaths)
- 66 (89%) were males
- 33 (45%) drowned in rivers/oceans/harbours
- 20 (27%) drowned at beaches
- 33 (45%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities (23), or fell (10) into the water prior to drowning

People 35-54 Years

- 72 people 35-54 years drowned last year (27% of all drowning deaths)
- 65 (90%) were males
- 18 (25%) drowned at beaches
- 31 (43%) drowned in rivers/oceans/harbours
- 15 (21%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities prior to drowning
- 10 (14%) were fishing prior to drowning

People 55+ Years

- 70 people aged over 55 years drowned last year (26% of all drowning deaths)
- 57 (81%) were males
- 27 (39%) drowned in rivers/oceans/harbours
- 15 (21%) drowned at beaches
- 13 (19%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities prior to drowning
- 13 (19%) were fishing prior to drowning

EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER

Lifesavers are everywhere in the community.

They can be teachers, students, mums, dads, firemen, plumbers or accountants. They patrol the houses, streets, workplaces and parks of the communities in which they live. They don't always wear a uniform but they can and do save lives.

Royal Life Saving is dedicated to turning everyday people into everyday community lifesavers.

We achieve this through:

- education
- training
- health promotion
- risk management
- advocacy
- sport and participation
- research

We've been doing this for over 100 years.
Our programs are well researched.
They are available to all.

Acknowledgements

Royal Life Saving acknowledges the following organisations for their assistance:

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit
- The National Coroners Information System
- State Coroners
- Media Monitors and Rehame
- Surf Life Saving Australia

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For more information contact:
Royal Life Saving Society Australia National Branch on **02 8217 3111**

ACT 02 6260 5800
NT 08 8981 5036
SA 08 8234 9244
VIC 03 9676 6900
NSW 02 9634 3700
QLD 07 3823 2823
TAS 03 6243 7558
WA 08 9383 8200

Other Royal Life Saving websites of interest are:
www.keepwatch.com.au
www.swimandsurvive.com.au
www.juniorlifeguard.com.au
www.bronzerescue.com.au
www.poolsafety.royallifesaving.com.au

Visit our website at:
www.royallifesaving.com.au