# A 10-year national study of child (0-4-years) drowning deaths

## 2016/17 to 2025/26

ROYAL LIFE SAVING AUSTRALIA

**170**

**children aged 0 – 4 years died from drowning** between July 2016 and June 2026

**17**

children aged 0 – 4 years **fatally drown each year on average**

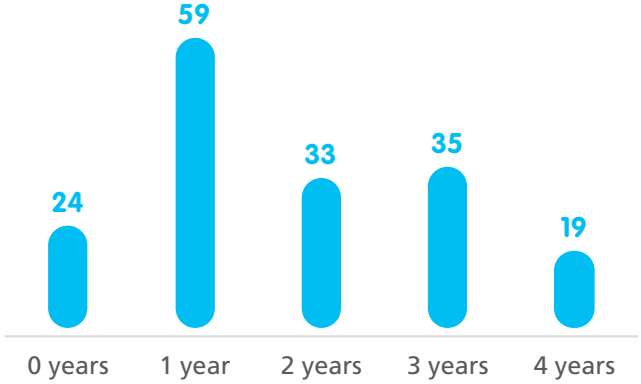
**1.12** per 100,000 people

**10-year cumulative crude** fatal drowning rate in children aged 0 – 4 years

There were nearly three times more drowning deaths among children aged 1-year, compared to those under a year. Over half (53%) of drowning deaths in one-year olds occurred in a swimming pool. Over half of child drowning deaths aged 0-4 occurred in males (58%), with leading activity being an unintentional fall into water (72%) followed by bathing (18%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represented 12% of child drowning deaths.

Over half (56%) of drowning incidents occurred at home and 14% occurred close to home (0-5km from home). Queensland had the highest number of drownings for this age group, representing 41% of all drowning deaths in children aged 0-4 years, followed by New South Wales (22%) and Victoria (17%).

Number of drowning deaths by single year age, July 2016 to June 2026




Top location of drowning

**49%** Swimming Pool

**17%** Bathtubs/spas

**15%** Lakes/Dams

**12%** Other

**5%** River/Creek

Where swimming ability was known (n=148, 87%):

- **39%** of children who drowned could not swim
- **26%** of children who could not swim were aged 3 years
- **9%** of children were considered poor swimmers

LOCATION IN FOCUS:

# Swimming pools

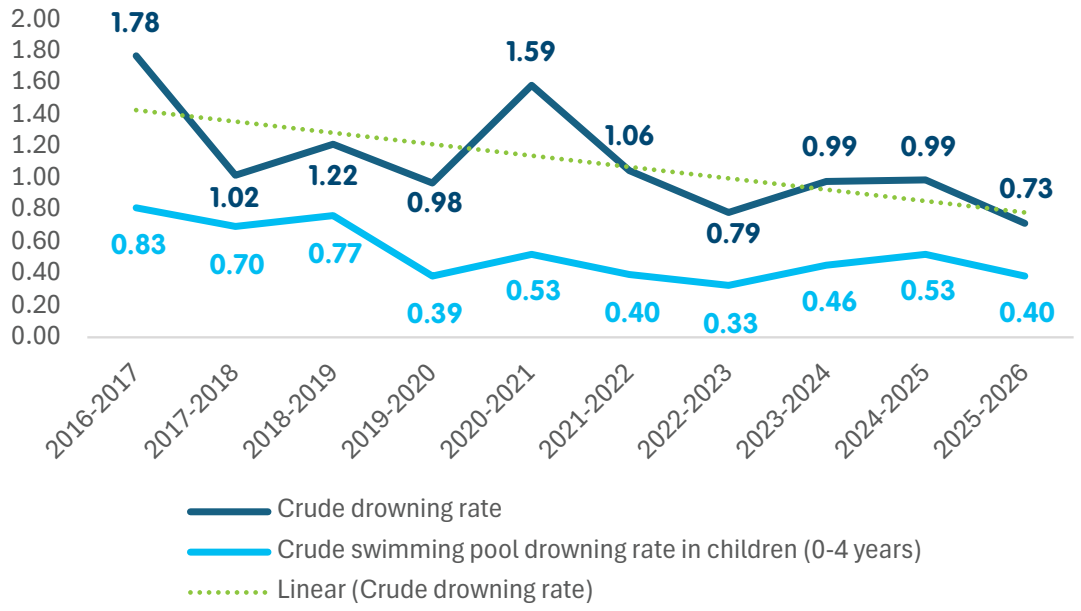
**83** children aged 0 - 4 years drowned in the last ten years at a swimming pool

Despite a gradual decrease in drowning deaths among children aged 0-4 years over the years, swimming pools are still the leading location for drowning deaths for this age group. The 10-year cumulative crude fatal drowning rate for swimming pool drowning deaths was 0.53 per 100,000 people. The average number of drowning deaths in swimming pools per year for this age group is 8 deaths per year.

- **37%** of these children were aged just one year
- **93%** occurred in a residential backyard pool
- **71%** of the swimming pools were fenced, of which:
  - **20%** were fenced but were not compliant according to fencing legislation
  - **14%** were fenced but faulty and not maintained
- **19%** of the swimming pools did not have a fence
- **34%** of cases reported the child was able to access the pool due to the gate being left open

**Supervision around pools:**

- **78%** of children were not being directly supervised around the swimming pool at the time of the drowning event
- **40%** of drowning cases, there was only one adult carer present
- **23%** of cases recorded an estimated absence of supervision longer than 15 minutes.



LOCATION IN FOCUS:

# Bathtubs & spas

**29**

## children aged 0 - 4 years drowned in the last 10-years in a bathtub/spa

- On average 3 young children drown in a bathtub every year
- **55%** were aged less than one years old
- **86%** of bathtub drowning deaths occurred while the child was not being directly supervised by an adult.
- **67%** of drowning cases, there was only one adult carer present
- **21%** of cases recorded an estimated absence of supervision lasting between 3 to 5 minutes.



# Recommendations

- Ensure that pool fences are maintained and compliant with regulations, gates are self-closing and are never left propped to restrict access to the pool.
- When taking care of multiple children, appoint a designated adult supervisor to actively supervise children when in or around water.
- When there is more than one carer, communication is important to know who is supervising children around the water.
- Children require all your attention all of the time when around water, if you need to leave for any reason, take the child with you
  - It is important to not be distracted by chores, phone or other people when a child is in a bath.
  - Prepare in advance for bathtime and have everything you need in the bathroom
- When there are multiple children in the water, do not leave young children in the care of older children.

Royal Life Saving Australia's Keep Watch public awareness and education campaign has been running for more than 25 years.

**Follow these safety tips to keep children safe around water:**

1. **Supervise.**
   Actively supervise children around water and stay within arm's reach
2. **Restrict.**
   Restrict children's access to water
3. **Teach.**
   Teach children water safety skills
4. **Respond.**
   Learn how to respond in the case of an emergency

KEEP WATCH

Keep Watch is supported by the Australian Government.

**Data source:**
The data presented in this report is sourced from the Royal Life Saving Australia National Fatal Drowning Database and is cross-checked with the National Coronial Information System (NCIS), with ethical access approved by the Victoria Department of Justice and Community Safety Research Ethics Committee (JHREC).

**Suggested Citation:**
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