

A 10-year national study 2015/16 to 2024/25

Lifestage in Focus: Children 0 - 4 years



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

182

children aged 0 – 4 years
died from drowning between
July 2015 and June 2025

18

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

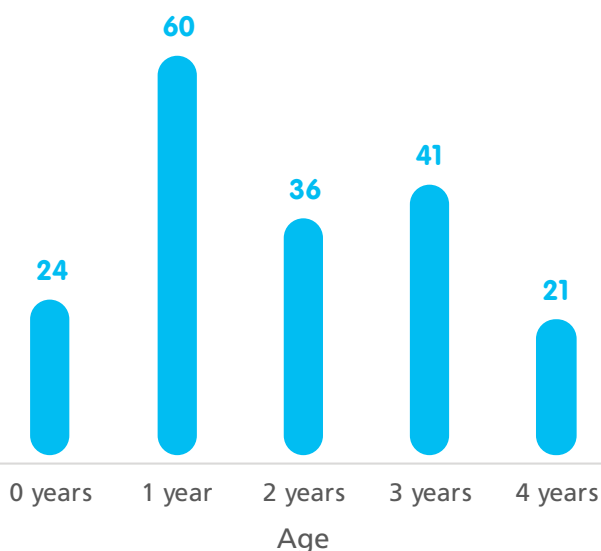
1.18

per 100,000
people

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

There were two and half times more drowning deaths among children aged 1-year, compared to those under one year of age. Half (50%) of drowning deaths in one-year olds occurred in a swimming pool. Over half of all drowning deaths aged 0-4 occurred in males (60%), the leading activity was an unintentional fall into water (73%) followed by bathing (18%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represented 15% of drowning deaths among children 0 - 4 years.

Number of drowning deaths by single year age,
July 2015 to June 2025



Top location of drowning



48% Swimming Pool



18% Bathtubs/spas



15% Lakes/Dams



10% Other



7% River/Creek

Where swimming ability was known (n=72, 41%):

- > **80%** of children who drowned could not swim
- > **30%** of children who could not swim were aged 3 years

Swimming pools

87

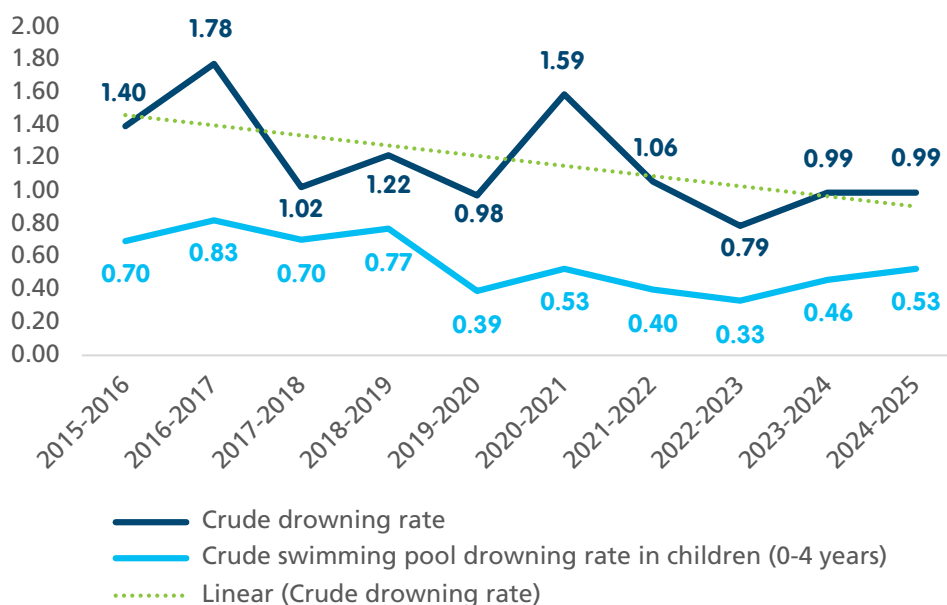
children aged 0 - 4 years drowned in the last ten years at a swimming pool

Despite a gradual decrease in drowning deaths among children aged 0-4 years over the past twenty years, swimming pools remain the leading location for drowning deaths for this age group. The 10-year cumulative crude fatal drowning rate for swimming pool drowning deaths was 0.56 per 100,000 people. The average number of drowning deaths in swimming pools per year for this age group is 9 deaths per year.

- **34%** of these children were aged just one year
- **91%** occurred in a residential backyard pool
- Where pool fencing was known (n=79, 91%), **71%** of swimming pools were fenced.
Of those that were fenced:
 - **21%** were fenced but were not compliant according to fencing legislation
 - **16%** were fenced but faulty and not maintained
- **20%** of the swimming pools did not have a fence
- **36%** 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
- **46%** of drowning cases, there was only one adult carer present
- **8%** of children were being supervised by a sibling that was 12-years or under
- **30%** of cases recorded an estimated absence of supervision longer than 15 minutes.



32

children aged 0 - 4 years drowned in a bathtub/spa

- › On average three young children drown in a bathtub every year
- › **56%** were aged less than one years old
- › **78%** of bathtub drowning deaths occurred while the child was not being directly supervised by an adult.
- › **75%** of drowning cases, there was only one adult carer present
- › **12%** of bathtub drowning deaths occurred while the child was being supervised by a sibling who was aged twelve years and under.
- › **19%** 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 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).

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