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**Royal Life Saving**

ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY - AUSTRALIA

FACT SHEET No. 31

# Non-Fatal Drowning

## Q. What is a non-fatal drowning?

A. There are three outcomes of a drowning: death, morbidity (injury), and no morbidity. If the person does not die from the drowning, then it is a non-fatal drowning with or without morbidity (injury).

## Q. What are the long term effects of a non-fatal drowning?

A. A person who does not die from a drowning incident and survives may experience either: no complications or, brain or other organ damage ranging from mild to severe. This is also known as hypoxic brain injury (brain damage due to lack of oxygen).

## Q: How common is non-fatal drowning in Australia?

A. Between 2002/03 and 2014/15, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data shows there were an average of 474 people per year admitted to hospital following a non-fatal drowning, compared to an average of 285 fatal drownings recorded for the same period.

## Q. Who is most at risk?

A. Children aged 0-4 years are at highest risk for both fatal and non-fatal drownings, and make up the largest proportion of hospitalisations compared to all other age groups. Overall, more males than females drown (fatal and non-fatal).

## Q. Where are non-fatal drownings most likely to occur?

A. Swimming pools (including backyard and public pools) record the largest number of non-fatal drownings, especially among young children. Teenagers and adults are more likely to get into difficulty in natural bodies of water such as in rivers, lakes and at beaches.

## Q. How is non-fatal drowning best prevented?

A. Survival is usually determined by how quickly the person is removed from the water, and how soon CPR is performed (if required). It is important to always actively supervise children at all times around water regardless of age and ability. For people of all ages, it is key to swim where there are lifeguards present, avoid alcohol around water and always wear a lifejacket when rock fishing or boating.

## Real Life Story - Non-fatal pool drowning

A child was found floating in the family swimming pool after his dad noticed that the pool gate was open. CPR was given straightaway. The child survived with severe brain damage. This story demonstrates that children can drown silently, without noise. This also highlights the importance of never propping the gate open, regularly checking and maintaining pool gates and latches, and ensuring that children cannot climb up onto anything to reach and open the gate. Always actively supervise children around water.

**ROYAL LIFE SAVING HAS DEVELOPED A NUMBER OF FACT SHEETS ON WATER SAFETY ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA.**

Contact Royal Life Saving on: **1300 737 763**  
or download them from: **[www.keepwatch.com.au](http://www.keepwatch.com.au)**



## Checklist:

- Always actively supervise children around water
- Supervising adult should always be within arms' reach of the child in and around water
- Ensure pool fence is correctly installed, regularly maintained and gate is never left open
- Create a safe play area to restrict a child's access to water around the home
- Enrol children in water familiarisation and learn to swim classes
- Establish simple rules such as no going near water without an adult
- Always swim at a patrolled beach and raise your arm for help if you get into difficulty
- Never swim alone
- Learn CPR. Enrol in a course or update your skills

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