

A 10-year national study 2014/15 to 2023/24

Lifestage in Focus: Children 0 - 4 years



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

197

children aged 0 – 4 years
died from drowning between
July 2014 and June 2024

20

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

1.28

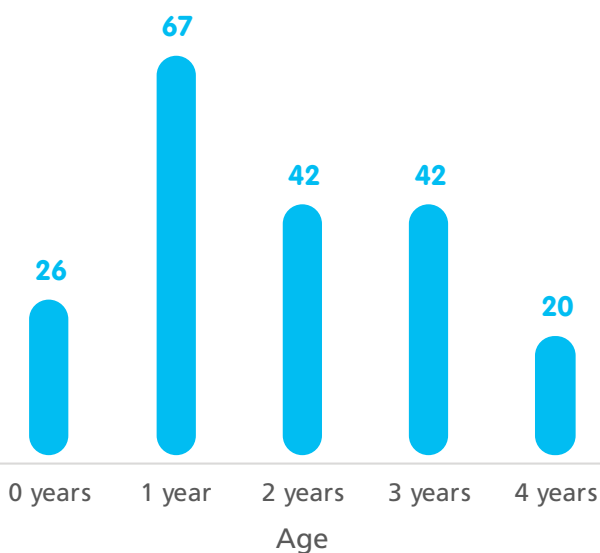
per 100,000
people

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

Over half (59%) of drowning deaths occurred in males, with leading activity being an unintentional fall into water (75%) followed by bathing (19%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represented 10% drowning among children aged 0 - 4 years.

There were nearly three times more drowning deaths among children aged 1-year, compared to those under a year. 57% of deaths in one-year olds occurred in a swimming pool.

Number of drowning deaths by single year age,
July 2014 to June 2024



Top location of drowning



47% Swimming Pool



19% Bathtubs/spas



15% Lakes/Dams



10% Other



8% River/Creek

Swimming pools

92

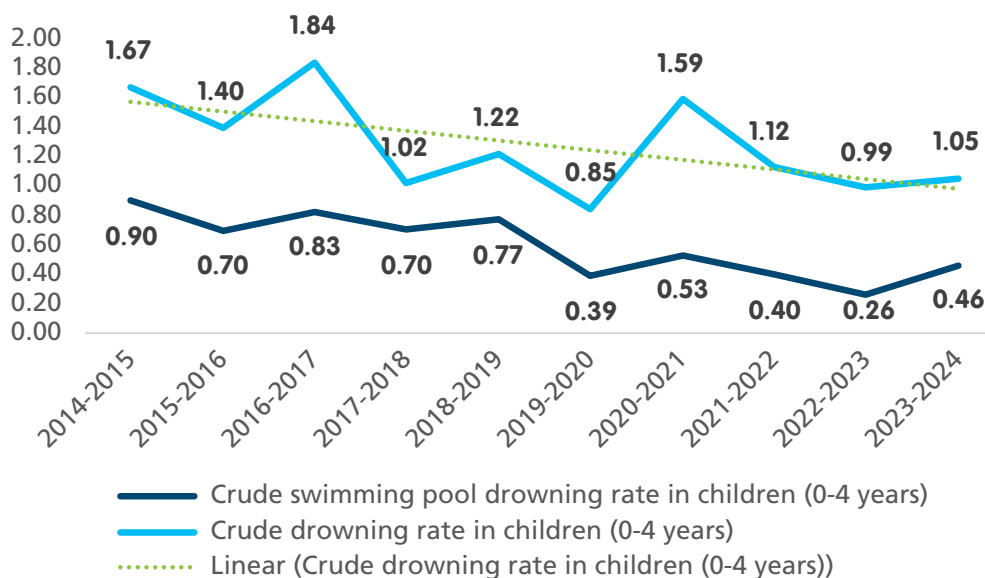
children aged 0 - 4 years drowned in a swimming pool

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 0.59 per 100,000 people. The average number of drowning deaths in swimming pools per year for this age group is 9 deaths per year.

- > 41% of these children were aged just one year
- > 91% occurred in a residential backyard pool
- > 70% of the swimming pools were fenced, of which:
 - 19% were fenced but were not compliant according to fencing legislation
 - 19% were fenced but faulty and not maintained
- > 19% of the swimming pools did not have a fence
- > **33% of cases reported the child was able to access the pool due to the gate being propped open**

Supervision:

- > **83% of children were not being directly supervised by an adult at the time of the drowning event**
- > **60% of drowning cases involved adult carers supervising multiple children at the time of the drowning event**
- > **45% of drowning cases, only one adult carer was present; of these, half (51%) were responsible for multiple children at the same time**
- > 19% of cases recorded an estimated absence of supervision between 5 to 10 minutes.
- > 9% of children were supervised by children under the age of twelve prior to the drowning event



LOCATION IN FOCUS:

Bathtubs & spas

37

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

- › On average 4 children drown in a bathtub every year
- › 54% were aged less than one year old
- › **87% occurred while the child was not being directly supervised by an adult**
- › 9% occurred while the child was being supervised by a sibling who was aged twelve years and under
- › **60% involved adult carers supervising multiple children at the time of the drowning event**
- › **76% there was only one adult carer present**
- › 19% of the incidents recorded an estimated absence of supervision lasting between 1 to 3 minutes.

REAL LIFE STORIES

Bathtime

A carer was bathing a young child in a bath, the carer required some items for the child and briefly left the bathroom to locate them, in the room next door. The carer could not hear the child making any noise and returned after a minute to find the child face down in the water.

This tragic case highlights the importance of direct supervision at all times and being prepared; children should not be left unattended in a bathtub.

Pool Party

A family hosted a social gathering at their home with a backyard swimming pool. A group of adults and children of multiple ages were playing in and around the pool area. When finished in the pool, they shifted to another part of the backyard to play games but unintentionally left the pool gate propped open. The children were left on their own to play outside while all the adults retreated inside. After some time, one adult checked on the children to find that one child was missing. After searching around the property, the missing child was tragically found submerged in the pool.

This case highlights the importance of always closing the pool gate and having a designated adult appointed to supervise children in and around water during social gatherings.

Recommendations

- › Children require all your attention all of the time when around water. When bathing, 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 taking care of multiple children, appoint a designated adult 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.
- › When there are multiple children in the water, do not leave young children in the care of older children.
- › Ensure that pool fences are maintained and compliant with regulations, gates are self-closing and are never left propped open.

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.

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