



Know · Learn · Connect



Drowning Prevention Toolkit

Background



With a vision for safer people and places, Injury Matters works to prevent and reduce the impact of injury and support those affected through education, support and advocacy. Through the Know Injury program, Injury Matters provides knowledge, training, resources, and networking opportunities for health professionals, local government, not-for-profit and community organisations to prevent injuries.

As part of the Know Injury program this toolkit provides information, resources and guidance to support Local Governments, health and community professionals in increasing community awareness of the importance of preventing drowning among toddlers.

What is drowning?

Drowning is the experience of respiratory impairment or suffocation, due to submersion in some form of liquid.¹

How common is toddler drowning?

In Australia, drowning is the leading cause of preventable death in children.² Young children are at heightened risk of drowning as they have low swimming ability, minimal awareness of water dangers, are relatively immobile and are entirely dependent on their caregivers.³

This increased risk amongst toddlers is evident in WA drowning fatalities, between 1 July 2003 and 30 June 2013, toddlers were hospitalised at seven times the rate of any other age group in WA.² During this period, 40 toddlers drowned in WA and 326 were hospitalised following a non-fatal drowning incident.² This equates to a yearly average of four fatal toddler drownings and 33 hospitalisations, with an average length of stay in hospital of 5.2 days.²

Prevention of drowning in the home environment needs particular attention, in WA between 2003 and 2013, 90% of drowning deaths and 73% of hospitalisations followed a drowning incident in toddlers aged 0-4 years that occurred in and around the home.² Of all toddler drowning fatalities, 40% occurred in a home swimming pool.²

A recent report into the incidence and costs of injury in WA highlighted that in 2012 drowning fatalities and hospitalisations had the highest mean cost at \$1,272,144 of all injury areas.⁴ This includes costs associated with presentations at emergency departments, hospital admissions, care aids, emergency transport and indirect costs such as long-term care, loss of paid productivity and quality of life lost. In addition to this, the report noted that the incidence of drowning fatalities and hospitalisations in WA had increased from 89 incidences in 2003 to 128 in 2012.⁴

When a non-fatal drowning occurs the individual may be not experience any immediate physical injuries, however they may experience brain damage, organ damage or long-term psychological trauma.⁵ Therefore, life-long physical and psychological factors from the incident can affect the individual, as well as family and friends.⁶

Preventing Toddler Drowning



How can toddler drowning be prevented?

Toddler drowning incidents can occur due to a range of circumstances. Fortunately, many drowning incidents can be prevented by always keeping watch of children in and around water, preventing children's access to water, teaching children to be water confident and learning CPR.

In all drowning fatalities and hospitalisations among toddlers in WA in 2003-2013, it was recorded that there was a lack of adult supervisions.²

Supervision is the best way to support child safety around the water. In order to effectively supervise children around water, an adult should be within arm's reach, engaged and interacting with the child at all times.⁷

In WA there are more than 170,000 home swimming pools.⁸ Due to the increased risk associated with home pools, it is vital that pool owners understand the importance of ensuring their pool meets the relevant regulations.

All private swimming and spa pools in WA, which contain water more than 300mm deep, must have a compliant barrier installed that restricts access to the pool.⁹ It is also important that barriers installed are used correctly, as in 62.5% of swimming pool drowning incidents that occurred in WA from 2003 to 2013, the barrier was ineffective due to the gate being propped open, not self-closing/self-latching, or the toddler gained entrance underneath the fence.² [The Royal Life Saving Society's checklist for pool barriers](#) outlines the key safety features of a pool barrier and supports pool owners to inspect barrier performance.¹⁰

WA's warm weather climate results in water-based activities being a large part of our culture. Water familiarisation from an early age can increase a child's safety when participating in these activities as it can increase the child's swimming ability, confidence and survival skills.²

A child with strong swimming ability does not 'drown-proof' the child; therefore, adults should always actively supervise children around water.

Early CPR has proven to contribute to an increased chance of survival in child drowning cases and every moment counts.² As parents and caregivers are often the first person to respond to a toddler drowning incident it is important that they have up to date CPR and first aid skills to ensure that they can respond appropriately in an emergency situation.²

What organisations work to reduce the incidence of toddler drowning in WA?



Royal Life Saving Society WA

The Royal Life Saving Society WA is a not-for-profit organisation, serving the community as the largest provider of water safety education in WA.

Royal Life Saving Society WA provides the Keep Watch program, which aims to reduce the incidence of toddler drowning in the community. The Keep Watch program has four key toddler drowning prevention messages, including, supervise children within arm's reach, prevent access to water, familiarise children with water and learn how to resuscitate.

Originally conceived in 1996 as solely a mass media campaign, the program now has additional strategies to strengthen, influence and to ensure that it reaches parents effectively. Some of these strategies include:

- [Educational and promotional materials](#)
- [Parent education sessions for parents and carers](#) of children aged 0-4 years throughout WA
- [Professional development presentations](#) for staff who play a role in promoting child safety
- [Heart Beat Club training courses](#) to develop the life saving skills of the community
- [Infant Aquatics lessons](#) to develop children's aquatic skills.



Royal Life Saving Society WA

Kidsafe WA is the leading independent not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting safety and preventing childhood injuries and accidents in Western Australia. Kidsafe WA work in the community to educate and inform parents and children on staying safe at home, at play and on the road.

Given the incidence of drowning among children, Kidsafe WA provide resources and education about keeping children safe around water. The online safety demonstration house also provides an interactive portal for parents and carers of children to learn about safety around the home, including water safety.

What role do Local Governments have in preventing toddler drownings?



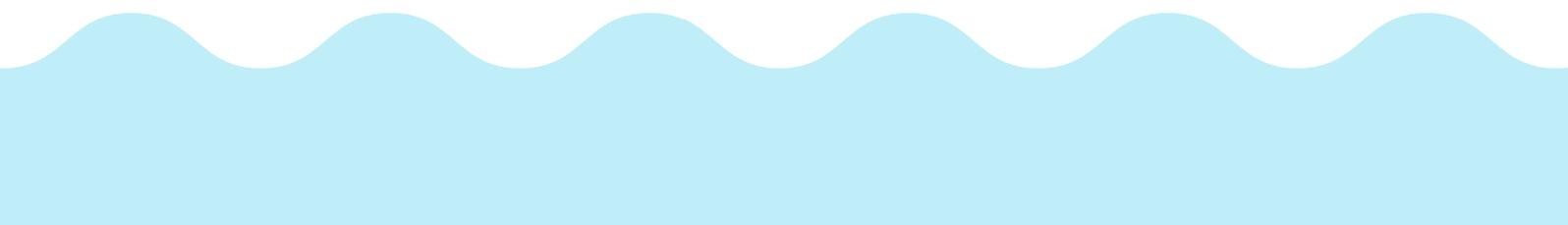
Local Governments play a direct role in reducing the incidence of toddler drowning within their local area by ensuring all public aquatic environments are safe and enforcing home pool legislations.

In addition to providing community members with a safe place to live, local governments have a responsibility to support the health of its residents. Drowning related incidents can significantly affect the health of residents; therefore it is important that local governments communicate drowning prevention messages within their community.

How can Local Governments and organisations get involved in the Keep Watch campaign?

ACTIVITY	
AWARENESS RAISING	Contact local radio stations or newspapers to promote drowning prevention messages.
	Use local statistics on the incidence of drowning to raise awareness at events, on social media or at education sessions.
	Contact Royal Life Saving WA to request a 30-60 minute Keep Watch water safety presentation for parents and carers of children aged 0 – 4 years.
COMMUNITY	Display Keep Watch posters and distribute educational resources (freely available from Royal Life Saving WA).
	Install water safety signage at local pools.
	Promote information about local Infant Aquatics programs .
PARTNERSHIPS	Partner with local organisations to implement water safety activities.
	Request a 30-minute Royal Life Saving WA Keep Watch water safety presentation for local organisations who have a role to play in promoting child safety.
	Contact Royal Life Saving WA to learn about ‘Heart Beat Club’ CPR training sessions and grants.

Located within this Toolkit are a range of media templates Local Governments can use to generate drowning awareness.



Communication Templates



Digital media is a great channel to generate awareness within your community about the importance of conducting safe behaviours to prevent the incidence of drowning.

Over the next two pages, Injury Matters has provided social media templates and ideas for social media, blog topic ideas, and a media release for you to use to generate this awareness.

Social Media Posts

1. Water. It's only safe while you're watching. <Insert campaign video <https://royallifesavingwa.com.au/programs/keep-watch/media-campaigns>>
2. Toddlers are attracted to water but cannot understand the dangers of falling in. Always keep watch of your child in and around water. <insert image https://royallifesavingwa.com.au/-/media/images/rlsswa/logo/program-logo/keep_watch.gif>
3. Creating a barrier between your child and a body of water is one of the most effective ways to prevent drowning. Ensure that your pool fencing and gates meet Western Australian legislation and are used correctly. Contact us today to find out more information about our home pool inspections <insert contact details>
4. Teach your child to be water confident from a young age, enrol in an approved aquatic program today at <view a list of endorsed swim schools [here](#) and insert names of your local swim schools>
5. Every second counts if a toddler has drowned. To ensure that you can provide the best assistance possible contact [Royal Life Saving WA](#) to find out about upcoming first aid courses.



Media Release Template



Keep Watch to prevent toddler drowning

The importance of active adult supervision in toddler drowning prevention is highlighted in a recent report into the incidence of drowning in toddlers aged 0-4 years in WA from July 2003 to June 2013. The report, by the Royal Life Saving Society of WA, indicates that all 40 toddler drownings incidents during the ten-year study period did not have appropriate adult supervision.

Having active adult supervision is vital for toddler water safety, as a child can drown in less than two minutes, in as little as 5cm of water and in absolute silence.

Mayor XXXX says drowning incidents can have significant impacts on the community however, they can be prevented.

“Children’s lack of awareness of water dangers, minimal swimming ability and dependence on their caregivers places them at risk of drowning. This is why it is very important that we always keep watch of our children around water,” s/he said.

Royal Life Saving Society WA’s Senior Manager of Health Promotion and Research, Lauren Nimmo says, “In WA we have had a significant decrease in toddler pool drowning deaths due to our strict pool fencing legislation and increased community awareness. However, drowning can happen in seconds, and active adult supervision is essential to preventing children drowning in backyard swimming pools.”

Western Australia’s for purpose organisation dedicated to preventing and reducing the impact of injury within the Western Australian community, Injury Matters says the prevention of drowning is an essential part of summer in WA.

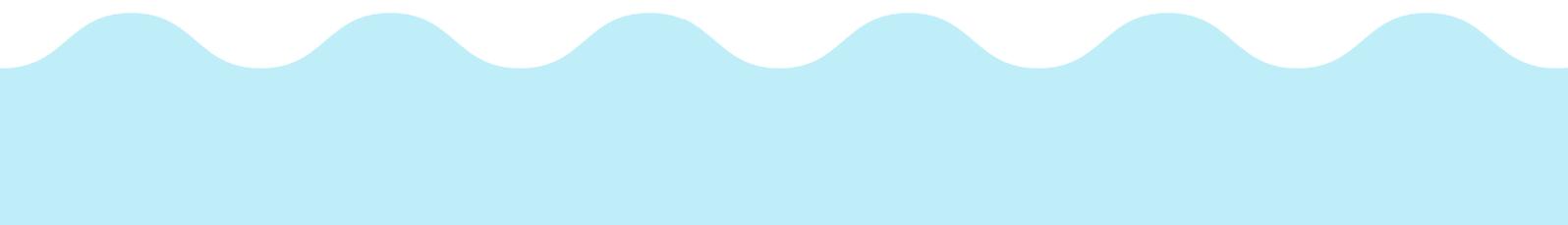
Injury Matters’ Chief Executive Sandy Lukjanowski says “with the warmer weather upon us and water based activities increasing, supervising your child within arm’s reach, teaching your child to be water confident, restricting their access to water, and learning how to resuscitate in case of an emergency, can increase child safety around water.”

The Royal Life Saving Society of WA’s Keep Watch program is supported by the Department of Health Western Australia and Principle Community Partner BHP.

For more information visit <https://royallifesavingwa.com.au/programs/keep-watch> or call 9383 8200.

ENDS

Media contact:
(Insert media contact)



What support can Injury Matters provide?



To assist you in communicating the prevalence of injuries in your local area, Injury Matters can provide you with data regarding the number of hospitalisations and fatalities within your local government or health region due to injury.

Located on Know Injury's Knowledge Hub are a number of fact sheets, resource kits and information to support health professionals conduct injury prevention activities. These tools can assist local government workers who are developing initiatives that aim to reduce the prevalence of drowning within their local area.

Finally, Injury Matters have relationships with a number of external organisations who lead the way in reducing the incidence of injuries in WA. If you are interested in partnering with other organisations to prevent the incidence of drowning or simply wish to find out what other work is being conducted to prevent drowning incidents please contact us so that we can assist you to locate this information.

Know Injury

Injury Matters' Know Injury program provides knowledge, training, resources, and networking opportunities aimed at preventing injuries in Western Australia.

To do this, Know Injury works with Local Governments, health workers, not-for-profit and community organisations to Know, Learn and Connect:

- **Know** about when, where, why and to whom injuries occur
- **Learn** how to adopt a public health approach to preventing injuries
- **Connect** with other people and organisations working to prevent injuries in WA

Know Injury is provided by Injury Matters and funded by the State Government through the Department of Health.

Partner:



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