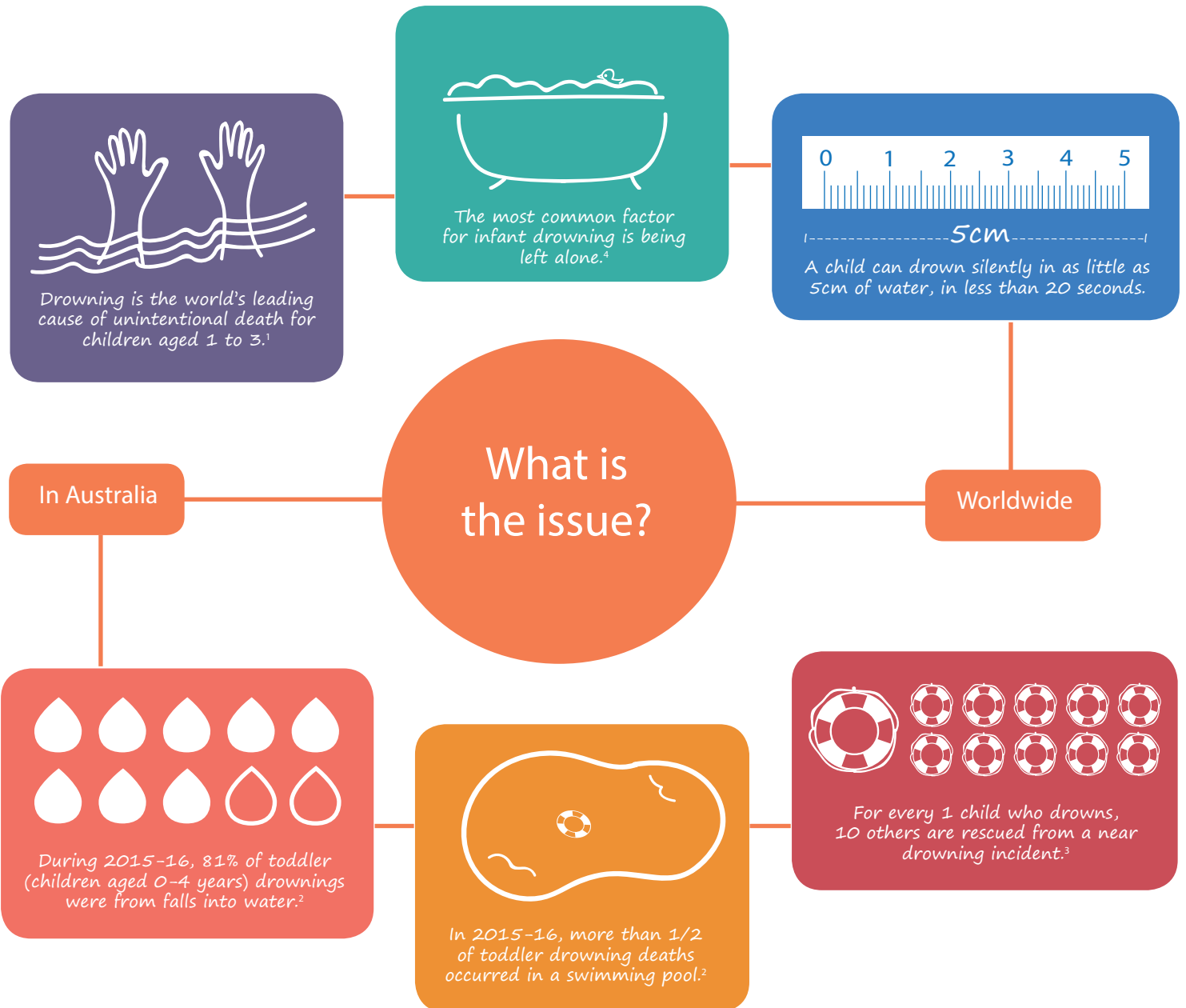


Drowning

Kidsafe SA Inc. | January 2017



Non fatal or near drowning incidents also cause numerous preventable injuries each year. They can have significant long term effects including brain damage and permanent disability.

Why are children at risk?

Children are at risk of drowning because they love to play with water and are naturally drawn to it but they do not understand the dangers it can hold. They are also top heavy and have the tendency to fall – these factors greatly increase their risk of drowning.

The backyard swimming pool is the single most dangerous water environment for young children.

However there are a number of other water environments which could be unsafe for children and cause drowning. This includes: the bottom of a bucket, the bath and toilet, swimming pools and spas, dams and rivers, animal troughs, rain water tanks, wells, pits that fill with water when it rains, fish ponds, and septic tanks just to name a few.

Drowning prevention

Kidsafe SA recommends that families undertake the following steps to reduce the risk of drowning:

1. Active supervision
2. Eliminating hazards
3. Restricting access
4. Education and developing skills

1. Active supervision

Constant adult supervision and keeping a close watch means ensuring you can see your child at all times. The most effective way to prevent drowning is to supervise your child at all times when they are in and around water.

What does active supervision mean?

Active supervision involves direct and constant monitoring of children, and ensuring you are in close proximity and can see them at all times. It includes scanning and moving around the area, listening closely for sounds or the absence of noise, observing play and putting away distractions.

Inactive or a lack of supervision is a major contributor to young children drowning. Young children should never be left alone or with another child, in or around any body of water. It is too much responsibility for an older child to watch younger children around water.

A particularly risky time is at social gatherings around a pool, where there are several adults and children. It is important during these gatherings that adults take turns being the designated person who is actively supervising children in and around the water. Similarly, at public swimming pools, lifeguards are not babysitters - children still need to be actively supervised by parents or carers.

It is also important that adults do not rely on flotation aids such as floaties or bubbles to prevent drowning.

2. Eliminating hazards

Eliminating water hazards, where possible, is an effective prevention method since it does not rely on barriers or other protective measures which may be ineffective. This includes tipping water out and correctly storing water prone items so that they can not fill with water and become a hazard.

For example, buckets and baths should always be left empty when not in use. Wading pools and clam shells must also be emptied when not in use and stored where they cannot collect rain water or water from sprinklers. Make sure dog water bowls and eskies are not accessible to young children.

3. Restricting access

Restricting access means ensuring that there is a barrier between your child and any body of water⁵.

What is a swimming pool?

The Development Act defines a swimming pool as an excavation or structure that is capable of being filled with water and is used primarily for swimming, wading, paddling, or the like, and includes a bathing or wading pool, or spa pool, but not a spa bath.

Pool fencing legislation in SA

All swimming pools MUST have a continuous safety barrier maintained by the pool owner that restricts access by young children to the pool.

Pool fencing legislation has assisted with reducing the number of drownings, with isolation fencing shown to be far more protective than previous requirements.

As a swimming pool owner, you are responsible for safety. For more information about pool fencing requirements in SA, click here or contact your local council.

The importance of pool fence maintenance

It is essential to maintain pool fences and ensure they are in good working order. A recent case study from New South Wales found that many of

the pools where children had drowned had fencing that was not complaint - 27% of pools had no fencing and a further 35% had faulty fencing.²

The most common pool barrier faults/ non-compliances include:

- Gates that don't self-latch or self-close.
- Climbable objects located in the 'non climbable' zone as outlined in the Australian Standards (e.g. objects such as pot plants, chairs, or pool pumps located near the pool fencing which could allow a child to climb over the fence).
- Excess space under the fence (more than a 100mm gap).
- Fence misuse (e.g. propping the pool gate open).

Swimming pools should be inspected regularly for maintenance issues.

For a detailed pool inspection checklist visit the Royal Lifesaving Australia website - www.royallifesaving.com.au



Install pool fences and ensure they are in good working order

Portable and above ground pools

If the pool has a filtration system, you will need to contact your local council about obtaining approval for the pool and to ensure safety features are in place.

Remove toys

It is important to remove pool toys from the water. A child may fall into the water while trying to retrieve a toy.

4. Education and developing skills

Teach children to swim

Most children can learn to swim from a young age, however swimming lessons alone will not stop a child from drowning. Children will still need to be actively supervised at all times.

It is also important that adults do not rely on flotation aids such as floaties or bubbles to prevent drowning.

Beware of drains

Do not allow children to play near or sit on pool or spa drains. Body parts and hair may be sucked in as a result of the strong suction. Use drain covers, and consider installing multiple drains to reduce suction strength. Do not buy a spa which has a filter drain installed on the floor. This type of drain has caused child deaths.

Learn resuscitation

The first few minutes of an emergency can make the difference between life and death. In many cases, help may take too long to arrive, so it will be up to you to know what to do.

- Learn CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) and update your training regularly.
- Keep CPR instructions on the pool fence and in the first aid kit.
- Have a mobile phone with you at all times when around the pool.
- Keep emergency numbers by the phone, or program 000 into your phone for speed dialling.

CPR posters and training are available from:

- Royal Life Saving Society - www.royallifesaving.com.au
- St John Ambulance - www.stjohnsa.com.au
- Surf Life Saving Association - www.surflifesavingsa.com.au/
- Red Cross - www.redcross.org.au/firstaid

References

1. World Health Organization. (2014). Drowning. [online] Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs347/en/> [Accessed 18 Mar. 2016].
2. Peden M, Oyegbite K, Ozanne-Smith J, Hyder AA, Branche C, Rahman FAKM et al. (eds) 2008. World report on child injury prevention. Geneva: WHO & UNICEF.
3. Wallis, B., Watt, K., Franklin, R., Nixon, J. and Kimble, R. (2015). Drowning Mortality and Morbidity Rates in Children and Adolescents 0-19yrs: A Population-Based Study in Queensland, Australia. PLOS ONE, 10(2), p.e0117948.
4. Royal Life Saving Society – Australia (2016) Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report 2016, Sydney Australia.
5. Royal Life Saving Society Australia - Restrict Access Factsheet - http://www.royallifesaving.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/3958/RLS_FactSheet_2.pdf

This resource is for general information only. Please consult Kidsafe SA or a health professional for specific information relating to your circumstances and your child.

For more information contact Kidsafe SA:
08 8161 6318 | sa@kidsafe.org.au | www.kidsafesa.com.au

Find us on   

