

# Water Safety

Children love water and have a natural curiosity about it. Water play can be a fun activity, and learning to swim has many benefits. However, the number one cause of death for Australian children under five is drowning. Children can drown quickly and silently – it only takes 20 seconds and a few centimetres of water. One- and two-year-old children are particularly at risk.

## Improving water safety

Supervision is vital in preventing childhood drownings or near-drownings. By learning and enforcing these four simple safety rules, you can help keep children safe around water:

<p><b>Rule 1</b></p> <p>Constant active supervision</p>	<p><b>Never take your eyes off children in, on or around water.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision means constant visual contact, not the occasional glance.</li> <li>• You should actively supervise children even if they can swim.</li> <li>• Avoid all distractions, including using a phone or answering the door.</li> <li>• Do not leave older children (under the age of 16) to supervise younger siblings.</li> <li>• Children under 5 must be within arms' reach, and children under 10 clearly and constantly visible and directly accessible.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rule 2</b></p> <p>Restrict access to water</p>	<p><b>It is illegal for pools and spas not to be fenced off.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private swimming pools and spas must have a childproof safety barrier.</li> <li>• Empty water from baths, buckets and wading pools immediately after use.</li> <li>• Watch children around fountains, Eskies, fishponds and pet bowls. If you can't empty the water, cover with a suitable material or put items away out of reach.</li> <li>• Check your home regularly for water hazards that may need repairs, such as broken pipes or open drains.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rule 3</b></p> <p>Learn first aid and resuscitation</p>	<p><b>Parents or carers should do a first aid course</b> to learn infant and child cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in the case of an emergency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First aid should be updated every three years, and CPR annually.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rule 4</b></p> <p>Increase water awareness</p>	<p><b>Swimming and water safety lessons are recommended for all children.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build your child's familiarity and confidence around water through aquatic play, setting rules and discussing water safety in a variety of locations.</li> </ul>

## Check your environment

By taking the time to check your surroundings, you can reduce the risk of drowning or a life-changing injury.

**Bath time:** Never leave a child under five alone in the bath and never leave older children or siblings to supervise.

- Let the water out as soon as bath time is over.

- Prevent scalds in the bathroom by reducing the temperature of the hot water to 50°C.

**In the pool:** A pool fence or lifeguards at a public pool are not substitutes for supervision.

- Ensure that fencing complies with the appropriate Victorian standards (<http://www.vba.vic.gov.au/consumer-resources/building/pages/swimming-pools>). Gates should open outward away from the pool, and be self-closing and self-locking. Never prop open a pool gate – it is illegal to do this.

**At the beach:** Beaches patrolled by lifesavers are the safest. Teach your child to swim between the red and yellow flags, which indicate the beach is patrolled by lifesavers.

- Supervise your children and look back at the beach regularly to ensure you are still between the flags while in the water.
- Teach your school-age children what to do if they are caught in a rip.

**Inland waterways – lakes, rivers, and dams:** Many drowning events occur in lakes, rivers or dams, sometimes after diving into shallow waters. Never dive into a body of water, and always check it's OK to swim before entering, even if you have been there before – conditions change over time.

- Teach your child not to go near the dam, creek, river or lake without you.
- Teach children they should never swim in fast-flowing water – submerged objects like trees and branches may not be visible and can cause serious injury.

## Key points to remember

- **Never leave a child alone around water.** Always actively supervise children in, around and on water.
- Restrict access to all sources of water and empty baths, buckets and wading pools immediately after use.
- Learn first aid and CPR in case of an emergency situation.
- Build your child's familiarity and confidence around water.
- Follow the rules and regulations of your local water environment and be aware of changing conditions.

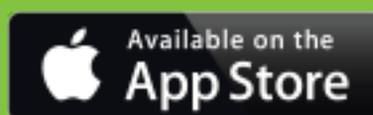
## More information

- Kids Health Info fact sheet – Bath safety ([www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Bath\\_safety/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Bath_safety/)), Pool safety ([www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Pool\\_safety/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Pool_safety/)) and Holiday safety ([www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Holiday\\_Safety/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Holiday_Safety/)).
- Royal Life Saving Society Australia – Toddler drowning (<http://www.royallifesaving.com.au/programs/keep-watch-toddler-drowning-prevention-program>).
- Life Saving Victoria – Watch around water (<http://lsv.com.au/pool-safety-services/watch-around-water/>)

Developed by RCH Community Information in consultation with Life Saving Victoria and RCH Trauma Service. First published 2015. Updated 2017.

## Kids Health Info app

The app will enable you to search and browse more than three hundred medical fact sheets and work offline.



## Disclaimer

This information is intended to support, not replace, discussion with your doctor or healthcare professionals. The authors of these consumer health information handouts have made a considerable effort to ensure the information is accurate, up to date and easy to understand. The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne accepts no responsibility for any inaccuracies, information perceived as misleading, or the success of any treatment regimen detailed in these handouts. Information contained in the handouts is updated regularly and therefore you should always check you are referring to the most recent version of the handout. The onus is on you, the user, to ensure that you have downloaded the most up-to-date version of a consumer health information handout.