



# KEEPING YOUR CHILD SAFE IN AND AROUND WATER

**A GUIDE FOR  
PARENTS  
& CARERS**

**A PROUD INITIATIVE BY**



**45  
YEARS**  
of making a safer  
world for kids





# KEEPING YOUR CHILD SAFE IN AND AROUND WATER

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# INTRODUCTION

Whether it be splashing in the bath, cooling off in a backyard pool, relaxing at the beach or camping by a river, being around water is part of everyday life in Australia.

However, did you know that drowning is one of the major causes of unintentional death for children under 5 years of age?

The good news is that drowning is preventable. This book is designed to help you keep your baby and young child safe when they are in or around water. You'll be guided through information on the most common drowning hazards to look out for and practical tips on what you can do to reduce the risk.

First, a little about us at Kidsafe. We are an independent, not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to make a safer world for kids at home, on the road, around water and at play. Since our establishment by a group of paediatricians in 1979, the number of children in Australia killed by preventable injury has reduced from more than 700 deaths per year, to just over 150.

While we're proud of this achievement, it still means there are three Australian families every single week who grieve the loss of their child due to an unintentional injury.

We're here to help you navigate your journey as a parent or carer. You can contact us through the details below and find many more free resources on our website.



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**THE GOOD  
NEWS IS THAT  
DROWNING IS  
PREVENTABLE**



# WHY ARE BABIES AND TODDLERS AT RISK OF DROWNING?

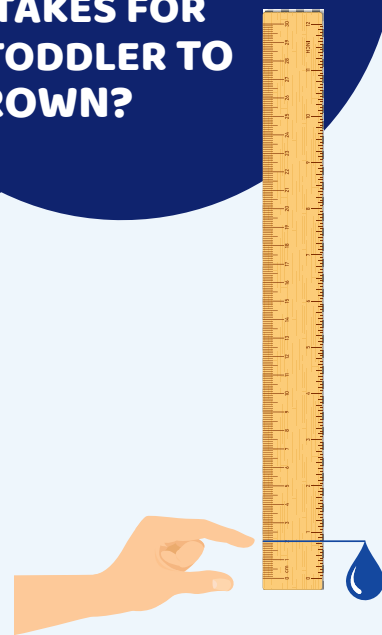
That means it's not just pools, spas, the beach and dams that pose drowning hazards for children. It can happen in the bath, buckets, toddler pools, fish ponds, eskies and even your pet's drinking bowl.

Drowning doesn't happen like it does in the movies - it's often silent, which means you won't hear splashing or loud calls for help.

Babies and toddlers are at particular risk of drowning because:

- They are quick, curious and love to explore.
- They are attracted to water, however they don't understand the dangers that it can pose.
- They tend to be top heavy, which means that they can easily topple into the water when leaning over or reaching for an object. If they do fall in, they don't have the physical strength and ability to help themselves get out.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT 20 SECONDS AND A FEW CENTIMETRES OF WATER IS ALL IT TAKES FOR A TODDLER TO DROWN?**



For more information on the most common injury hazards for your child's age and stage, download our [Ages and Stages Fact Sheets](#).

# KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN AND AROUND WATER

**SUPERVISE  
RESTRICT  
TEACH  
RESPOND**

There are four important steps you can follow to reduce the risk of drowning for your baby or child. To help keep them as safe as possible, it's important that all of these steps are used together.



## 1. SUPERVISE

Active adult supervision is the most important thing you can do to help keep your children safe around water. For toddlers, this means having an adult within arm's reach at all times when they are in or around water, with no distractions such as mobile phones, cooking dinner or hanging out the washing.

If you have to leave the water area, always take the children with you. It's not safe to leave older children to supervise younger ones – they may not realise when a young child is in danger or be able to help in an emergency.



## 2. RESTRICT

You can help to make sure that your child doesn't have unsupervised access to water by placing a barrier between them and the water – this could be a pool fence, locking the door to the bathroom, or placing mesh on water features and fish ponds.

You can also set up safe play areas such as play pens or gated areas inside and outside your home, which are away from bodies of water and other hazards such as the kitchen, driveways and animals.



## 3. TEACH

Water awareness and learn-to-swim classes can help children become familiar with water while also teaching them about water safety and vital swimming skills.



## 4. RESPOND

In an emergency, every second counts. Learning CPR and updating your skills regularly is an important part of keeping young ones safe in and around water. Hopefully they are skills you will never have to use, however completing a course will help to ensure you are prepared to respond if an emergency does happen.



**You can learn more about the first aid courses we offer with Emergcare – which include injury prevention information as well as treatment – and book your spot by visiting our [website](#).**



# **WATER HAZARDS INSIDE YOUR HOME**

# BATHS

Bath time can be a wonderful experience for kids, providing them with an opportunity to play and splash around. It is also a great way for your child to become comfortable and familiar with the feel of water from a young age.

While bath time can be fun, baths are one of the most common places where toddlers drown. Drowning incidents commonly occur when there is a distraction or break to routine which leads to lapses in supervision. Common distractions include household chores such as putting out the washing, visitors at the door, taking the rubbish out or checking on dinner, as well as electronic distractions such as phones.

## Keeping children safe at bath time

- ✓ Make sure an adult is always actively supervising children when in the bath. This means being within arm's reach at all times with no distractions such as a phone, checking on dinner or the doorbell.
- ✓ Never leave younger children in the care of older ones – they may not recognise when a younger child is in danger and may not be able to help.
- ✓ Have everything you need such as towels, soap, nappies and clothes within reach before starting the bath.
- ✓ If you have to leave the bathroom, always take your children with you.
- ✓ For bubs, fill the bath with just enough water to let you wet your child with your hands.
- ✓ Empty the bath straight after bath time and store the plug up high and out of reach.
- ✓ Close the bathroom door when not in use.

**MAKE SURE  
AN ADULT IS  
ALWAYS  
ACTIVELY  
SUPERVISING  
CHILDREN**



For more information please [watch our video on Bath safety](#)





# BABY BATH AIDS

Baby bath aids are made to help support a baby during bath time, allowing you to comfortably clean your baby while supporting their head above the water.

While bath aids can be convenient, they are not safety devices and aren't made to stop children from drowning. Tragically, babies have drowned in Australia when using bath aids. Babies can easily slip, roll or climb out of the aid, get trapped in its openings, or even tip it over.

## Keeping your baby safe when using a baby bath aid

Along with the general bath advice above, additional tips to keep in mind when using a baby bath aid include:

- ✓ Check that the baby bath aid is the right one for the age and size of your child. Take notice of the warning labels, which include important safety information.
- ✓ Keep at least one hand on your baby to make sure they don't slip into or under the water.



For more information on using baby bath aids safely, please watch [our video](#).

**KEEP AT LEAST ONE HAND ON YOUR BABY TO MAKE SURE THEY DON'T SLIP INTO OR UNDER THE WATER**



# OTHER WATER HAZARDS INSIDE YOUR HOME

There are a range of other potential drowning hazards inside our homes, including buckets (e.g. mop and nappy buckets), sinks, and even items such as the toilet and washing machine.

Babies and children can often be attracted to these items without understanding the hazards that they pose.

## Keeping children safe around water in your home

- ✓ Always empty buckets – including mop buckets and other buckets around the house – right after you have finished using them.
- ✓ Close the doors of front-loading washing machines when not in use to help stop babies and children climbing inside.
- ✓ Empty sinks straight away and store the plugs up high out of reach.
- ✓ Keep doors to bathrooms and the laundry closed so that children can't access them unsupervised.
- ✓ Install a toilet lock to help prevent babies from opening the toilet.

**ALWAYS  
EMPTY  
BUCKETS**



**KEEP DOORS  
TO BATHROOMS  
AND THE  
LAUNDRY  
CLOSED**





**WATER HAZARDS IN YOUR  
BACKYARD AND GARDEN**

# SWIMMING POOLS AND SPAS

Backyard pools and spas are a great addition to any home and provide hours of fun for the whole family. However, did you know that they're one of the most common locations where toddlers drown?

Any pool or spa that can hold more than 30 centimetres of water is legally required to be surrounded by a safety barrier in Victoria. This includes in-ground pools, above-ground pools, portable pools - yes, even those little inflatable ones - and spas.

If you have a home pool or spa, you'll need to register it with your local council, and organise for your barrier to be inspected every four years. You can find more information on these requirements by visiting the Victorian Building Authority website or by contacting your local council.

## Pool and spa barrier issues to regularly check for

While pool and spa barriers help to reduce the risk of drowning incidents, evidence suggests that many drowning deaths involve barriers that are faulty, have not been maintained or are non-compliant with Australian standards.

Pool barriers and gates are used a lot, and they are also out in the sun, wind and rain all year round, which can lead to damage. That's why it's important to check them every year and make sure they are in good working order.

**ARE GATES ALWAYS KEPT CLOSED AND NEVER PROPPED OPEN?**

## Here are the top 5 common issues to regularly check for:

- ✓ Are all gates and doors still self-closing?
- ✓ Are all gates and doors still self-latching?
- ✓ Are gates always kept closed and never propped open?
- ✓ Are there any gaps, holes or spaces in and under the barrier which a child could get through?
- ✓ Are there any climbable objects near the pool barrier e.g. BBQ, outdoor furniture or trees which a child could use to climb up and over the barrier?

You can download a free home pool safety checklist by visiting the [Victorian Building Association website](#).



[Learn more about Josie's story and how a propped open pool gate led to tragedy.](#)



Please note, that this story can be triggering and difficult to watch, so only do so if you are in a safe space with support.

Josie's story highlights the crucial role of pool barrier safety. Using a garden rock to prop open a pool gate led to a heartbreaking incident. Let's honour Josie by committing to keeping our pool gates securely closed at all times.

# SWIMMING POOLS AND SPAS...

## Keeping children safe around swimming pool and spas

- ✓ As with any body of water, make sure an adult is always actively supervising children around pools and spas. For toddlers, this means having an adult within arm's reach at all times, with no distractions.
- ✓ Take your child with you if you need to leave the pool or spa area – even if you think you'll only be gone for a moment.
- ✓ When there are lots of adults around at pool parties, it can be easy to think that someone else is actively supervising the kids around water when in fact, nobody is. It's a good idea to nominate designated adult 'supervisors' to make sure children are being actively supervised at all times. This role can be shared throughout the day so that everyone gets a chance to relax, chat and enjoy themselves.
- ✓ Keep a CPR chart near your pool and spa area for quick reference in an emergency.
- ✓ When left in and around the pool, toys such as inflatables, balls and dive rings/sticks can attract the attention of little ones, who may try to get through or over a fence, or reach out to try to get the toy from the pool's edge. To help keep everyone safe, remember to pack up all toys and store them out of children's sight and reach after use.
- ✓ Remember that while floaties and inflatable pool toys can be fun, they are not safety devices and aren't designed to prevent drowning.

Mum Mel knows just how important it is to make sure somebody is supervising children around the pool. Her son was lucky to survive after falling into a pool at a party.



[Learn more about Mel's story by watching her video.](#)



Please note, that this story can be triggering and difficult to watch, so only do so if you are in a safe space with support.



**TAKE YOUR CHILD WITH YOU IF YOU NEED TO LEAVE THE POOL OR SPA AREA**

# PORTABLE POOLS AND SPAS

Portable pools are also sometimes called inflatable pools, kiddie pools, toddler pools or splash pools, and come in different sizes. They can be an affordable way to stay cool on hot days, but they can also pose a drowning hazard for babies and children.

Any portable pool or spa that can hold more than 30 centimetres of water is legally required to be surrounded by a safety barrier in Victoria. You can visit the Victorian Building Authority website and your local council for more information.

## Keeping children safe around portable pools

- ✓ Even if your portable pool holds less than 30 centimetres of water, it can still pose a drowning hazard. Empty it out and pack it away as soon as you have finished using it. This helps to make sure that the pool can't fill with rainwater or water from the hose or sprinkler.
- ✓ As always, make sure an adult is actively supervising babies and children around portable pools, with no distractions.



For more information on portable pool safety, please visit the [Royal Life Saving Society of Australia's Portable Pool Safety website](#)



**AS ALWAYS, MAKE SURE AN ADULT IS ACTIVELY SUPERVISING BABIES AND CHILDREN AROUND PORTABLE POOLS**



# SEPTIC PITS

Septic systems are often found in homes that are in unsewered areas. They treat, recycle or dispose of wastewater from areas of the home such as bathrooms, kitchens and toilets.

While septic systems are required to have a secured lid, some older systems may not have been checked for many years. If the lid is damaged or not secured properly, this can pose a serious hazard, especially for children.

## Keeping children safe around septic pits

- ✓ Know where septic pits are on your property or properties you are visiting.
- ✓ Regularly check septic pits to make sure they are still in good condition and are properly secured.
- ✓ If you notice that the lid is damaged or not secured properly, it's important to fix it straight away.
- ✓ Never drive a vehicle over or park on septic systems as this can damage the lid or cause it to come loose.
- ✓ Where available, install a child-resistant screen under your septic system lid as a back-up if the lid fails.
- ✓ Create a fenced safe play area away from hazards such as septic systems, other bodies of water and vehicles.

In March 2023, Amanpreet's world was turned upside down when her 3-year-old son, Nihal, tragically drowned after stepping onto an unsecured septic pit and falling in. Learn more about Amanpreet's story and the work we're doing with her to help make septic systems safe.



[Learn more about Amanpreet's story by watching her video.](#)



Please note, that this story can be triggering and difficult to watch, so only do so if you are in a safe space with support.

**KNOW WHERE  
SEPTIC PITS  
ARE ON YOUR  
PROPERTY OR  
PROPERTIES YOU  
ARE VISITING**



# OTHER OUTDOOR DROWNING HAZARDS

Toddlers can drown in as little as a few centimetres of water, which means there are lots of other potential drowning hazards in our yards including fishponds, eskies, buckets and even pet water bowls.

## Keeping children safe from outdoor water hazards

- ✓ Always empty out melted ice in eskies.
- ✓ Cover ponds, birdbaths and similar water sources with mesh or a grate.
- ✓ Keep pet water bowls out of reach of children.
- ✓ Always actively supervise children around all water sources.

Brooke learned just how dangerous a small body of water can be when her 13-month-old toddler toppled into an esky while playing outside.

After a couple of minutes, Brooke realised it was too quiet and ran to the backyard but couldn't see her son. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a pair of tiny legs sticking up out of the esky, which had been left outside from a party to let the ice melt.

Fortunately, Brooke had recently completed a First Aid course and immediately called 000 before starting CPR. Her training and quick action resuscitated her baby boy, who has since grown into a healthy child.



[Learn more about Brooke's story by watching her video.](#)



Please note, that this story can be triggering and difficult to watch, so only do so if you are in a safe space with support.

**COVER PONDS, BIRDBATHS AND SIMILAR WATER SOURCES WITH MESH OR A GATE**







# **WATER SAFETY ON THE FARM**

# WATER HAZARDS ON FARMS AND REGIONAL PROPERTIES

Farms are exciting places for children to live, explore and visit. However, as well as being a family home, they are also often a workplace. This means they have a lot of different injury hazards that you don't find in most suburban homes – including a range of drowning hazards.

Tragically, drowning continues to be one of the leading causes of unintentional death for Australian children under the age of 5 on farms.

Common drowning hazards found on farms and regional properties include dams, creeks, lakes, tanks, troughs, irrigation channels and post holes.

## Keeping children safe around water on the farm

- ✓ Make sure children are always actively supervised by an adult when in or around water. For toddlers, this means having an adult within arm's reach.
- ✓ Set up a safe play area away from water hazards such as dams.
- ✓ Make sure that water storage areas such as wells and tanks are securely covered.
- ✓ Where practical, remove items floating in dams that may attract children into the water.
- ✓ Dress children in brightly coloured clothing to help them be seen when on farms.
- ✓ Fill in unused holes where water can gather, such as ditches, dips and post holes.
- ✓ Learn CPR and regularly update your skills.

**MAKE SURE CHILDREN ARE ALWAYS ACTIVELY SUPERVISED BY AN ADULT WHEN IN OR AROUND WATER**



# WATER HAZARDS ON FARMS AND REGIONAL PROPERTIES

## Safe play areas

While it is not always practical to fence off large bodies of water on farms and regional properties, creating a safe play area away from these hazards is a great way to help reduce the risk of drowning and provide kids with a place to explore and have fun.

### When setting up a safe play area, it should:

- ✓ Be close to the home and clearly visible.
- ✓ Be securely fenced with a self-closing and latching gate.
- ✓ Be away from hazards such as dams, animals, machinery and vehicles.
- ✓ Have shade as well as a range of fun and interesting things for children to do.

Ash and Matt know just how dangerous dams can be. In 2020, their 2 year old son Hunter was happily feeding horses on a farm when he silently fell into a nearby dam and drowned.



[Learn more about farm water safety by watching our video.](#)



Please note, that this story can be triggering and difficult to watch, so only do so if you are in a safe space with support.

**CREATE SAFE PLAY AREAS AWAY FROM HAZARDS SUCH AS DAMS, ANIMALS, MACHINERY AND VEHICLES**





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