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# 302

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PEOPLE DROWNED IN AUSTRALIAN WATERWAYS  
BETWEEN 1 JULY 2008 AND 30 JUNE 2009

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## THE NATIONAL DROWNING REPORT 2009.

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SPECIAL ISSUE:  
Child Drowning Deaths

## THE CHALLENGE

# DROWNING DEATHS IN 2008/09

The number of people drowning has exceeded 300 for the first time in six years, reminding us that we cannot be complacent.

There were 302 drowning deaths in Australian waterways between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2009.

This figure is an increase of 41 on last year's figure and an increase of 25 on the 5 year average. The drowning death rate per 100,000 people was 1.40, a return to levels of pre 2005/06. (Figure 1)

### Eliminating Child Drowning

With the number of children being born in Australia rising; parents, government and the community must address the often neglected risk of child drowning before further lives are lost this summer.

Child drowning remains a significant cause of preventable death, particularly in children aged under 5 years. Parents and carers can reduce this risk and provide their children valuable skills for life by following a number of actions.

**These actions are: active supervision, restricting the child's access to water, taking their child to water familiarisation lessons and learning resuscitation.**

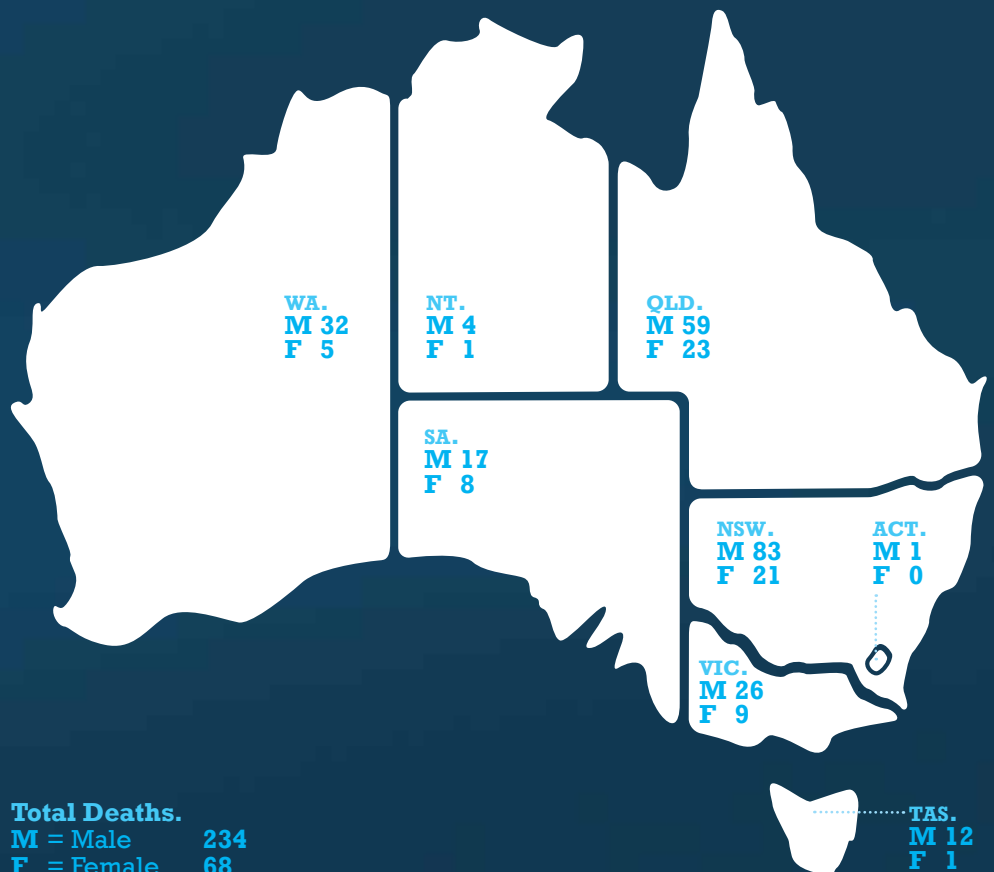
This year marks the 15th Royal Life Saving Society - Australia National Drowning Report. Exactly 10 years ago the 5th National Drowning Report in 1999 identified 305 drowning deaths, a figure similar to that reported this year. Whilst the headline figure is almost the same, drowning in children under five has more than halved since 1999.

This reduction has been achieved through a range of child drowning prevention strategies, including:

- Research into the causes and prevention of drowning,
- Introduction of pool fencing regulations in every State and Territory to ensure that home swimming pools are fenced,
- Revisions in Australian Standards for home pool fencing, learn to swim devices and toys,
- Public awareness campaigns such as the Royal Life Saving Keep Watch program,
- Educating health professionals and those who have contact with parents and carers about child drowning prevention strategies,
- Quality instructors in resuscitation and swimming & water safety programs,
- Working with industry to improve supervision at public swimming pools.

Whilst the reduction since 1999, in this age group is impressive and many lives have been saved, there is no room for complacency. Royal Life Saving is calling for further collaborative efforts, particularly in the areas of research, legislation and parental awareness in order to eliminate child drowning in the coming year.

## Drowning Deaths by State and Territory



## METHODS

Information for the National Drowning Report 2009 has been collected from State and Territory Coronial Offices, the National Coroners Information System (NCIS) and media reports. It is collated in partnership with Royal Life Saving Branches and analysed by the Royal Life Saving National Office.

Royal Life Saving uses a media monitoring service (both electronic and print all year round) to identify drowning deaths reported in the media.

All care is taken to ensure that the information is as accurate as possible. However, these figures should be considered interim until the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) releases its 'causes of death' figures for the year 2009. These figures may change depending upon ongoing coronial investigations and findings as 83.8% of cases compiled in this report for 2008/09 are still open.

The report contains information on drowning deaths known as at 19 August 2009.

The 5 year average figures are based on information from the NCIS. Exclusions include suicide, homicide, natural death (such as cardiac arrest), shark and crocodile attack, or hypothermia where known. All information presented is about drowning deaths.

Not included in this year's (2008/09) report are: 5 people who drowned at Ashmore reef in Northern Territory while trying to enter Australia illegally; 4 crocodile related deaths; a small number of scuba diving deaths as the cause of death was due to other medical conditions, that is, they were not drowning related.

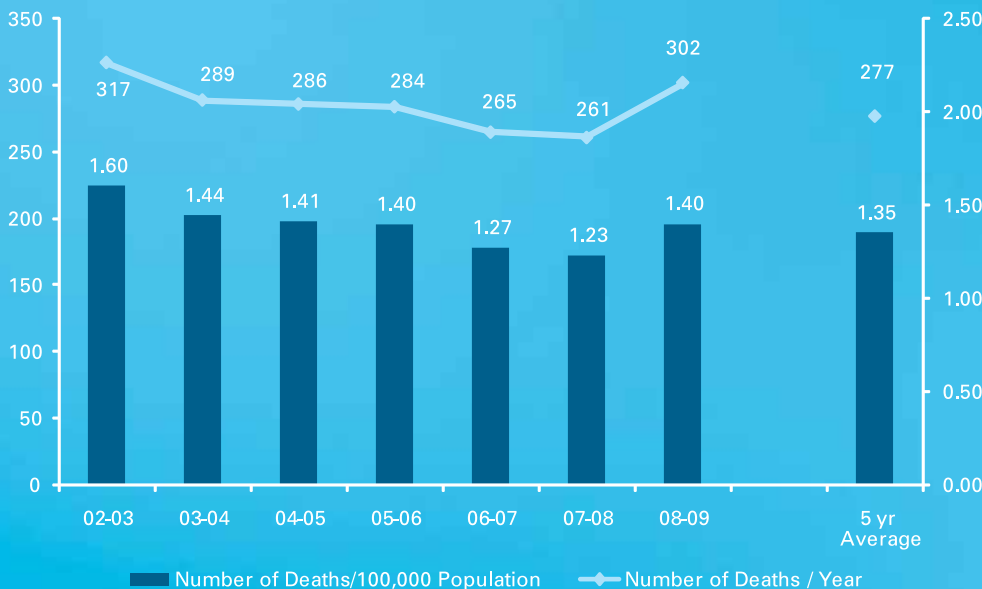
## SNAPSHOT: ROPE THROW

Ensuring we have a water safety culture in Australia means that people are adequately prepared for living, working and recreating in a diverse range of aquatic locations.

A recent study from the Royal Life Saving Society - Australia shows that throwing a lifeline or rope is both simple and could save your life and that of the person you are trying to rescue.

This study looked at untrained adults' throwing ability and found that only 20% can throw a lifeline to within 2m of the victim on the first attempt, however with practice this result can be improved.

FIGURE 1. Unintentional Drowning Deaths and Death Rates, Australia 2002/03 to 2008/09, 5 year average



Pearn and Franklin (2009). "Flinging the Squaler" Lifeline rescues for drowning prevention. *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education* 3(3) 315-321.

## CASE STUDY: SWIM AND SURVIVE

To ensure a 50% reduction in drowning deaths by 2020, water safety and lifesaving education is vital for all school children. There were 11 drowning deaths in children aged 5-14 years in 2008/09. Royal Life Saving believes children can start working towards becoming a lifesaver, by learning water safety and swimming skills at an early age.

The Royal Life Saving Swim and Survive program is the perfect start to a lifetime of safe participation in recreational activities in and around water.

More information at [www.royallifesaving.com.au](http://www.royallifesaving.com.au)

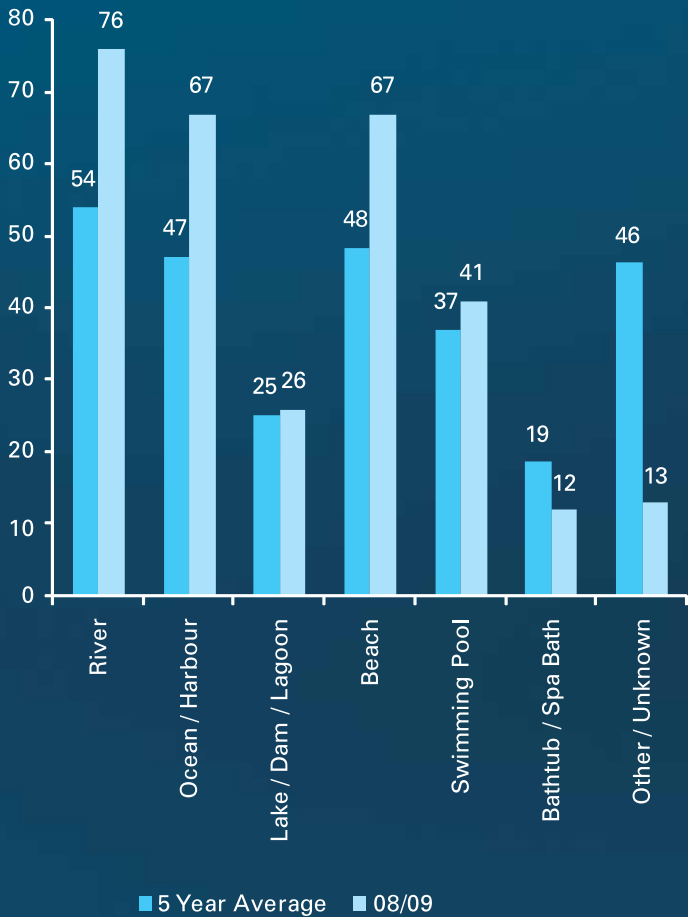


# LOCATIONS OF DROWNING DEATHS

There have been increases in the number of people drowning in all locations except for bathtub / spa baths and other / unknown (Figure 2).

Significant increases were found in river (including creeks and streams), ocean / harbour (including bays and marinas) and beach (including rocks and shorelines) locations. An improvement in the data collection has resulted in fewer drowning deaths being reported in the unknown / other category.

FIGURE 2. Drowning Deaths by Location, Australia 5 Year Average, 2008/09



302 people drowned in Australian waterways between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2009.

There were 76 drowning deaths at rivers last year, the average age being 44 years (median = 43; range = 1 to 83 years) (Figure R1). Activity was unknown in over a quarter (28%) of cases, mainly due to the person being alone at the time of the incident. In nearly a fifth of cases (18%) the person was in a car being driven through a flooded river / creek (Figure R3), prompting warnings from Royal Life Saving not to drive through flooded roads. Drowning deaths in rivers occurred all year round with a peak in January and February (Figure R2).

FIGURE R1. River Drowning Deaths by Age Group, Australia, 2008/09

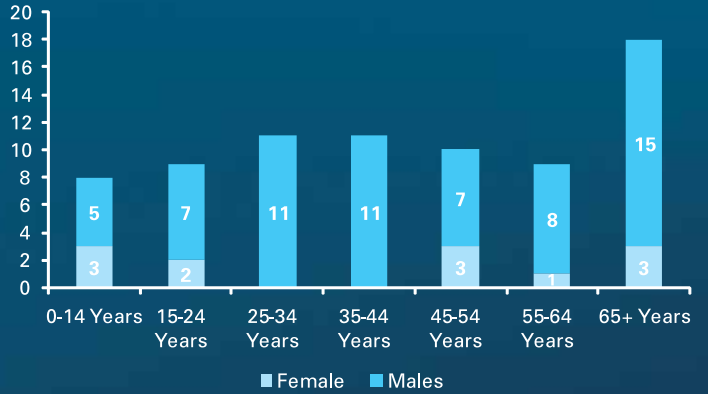


FIGURE R2. River Drowning Deaths, Month of Incident, Australia, 2008/09

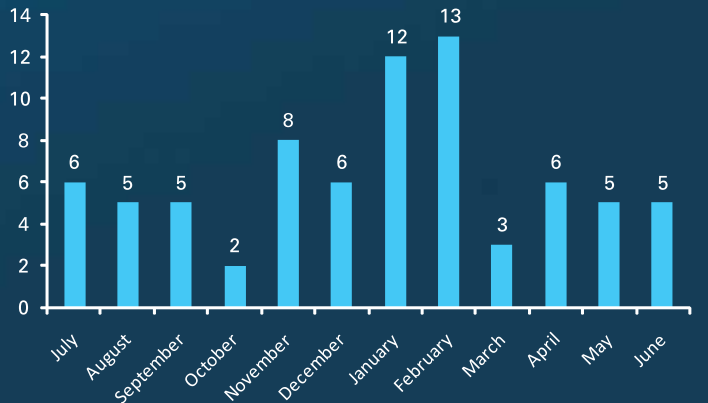
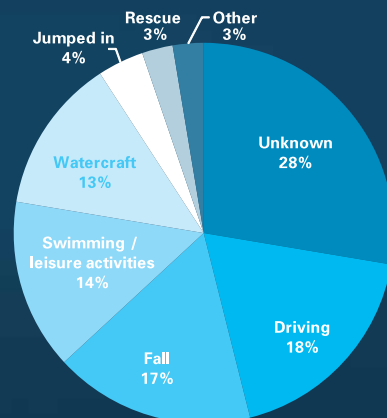


FIGURE R3. River Drowning Deaths, Activity Immediately Prior to Drowning, Australia, 2008/09



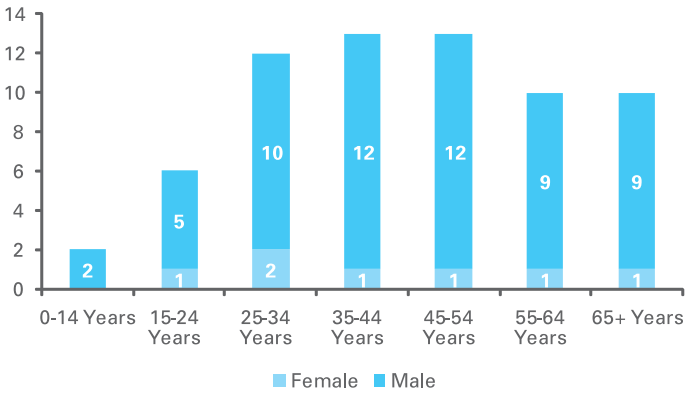
Never try to drive through a flooded road.

## OCEAN / HARBOUR

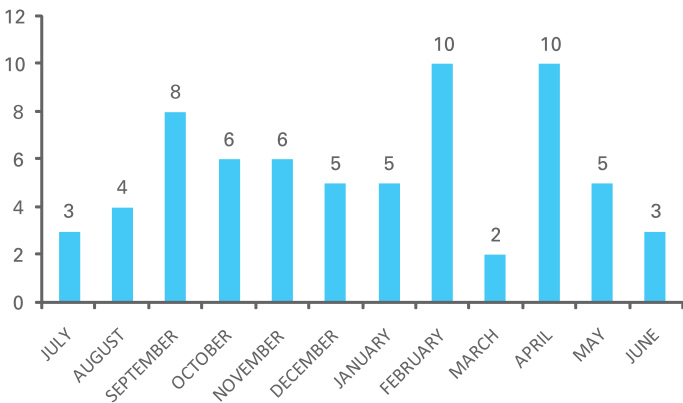
There were 67 people who drowned in Ocean / Harbour locations, the average age being 45 years (median = 44.5; range = 1 to 84 years) (Figure O1). Fishing (21%) and diving (21%) were the most common activities being undertaken immediately prior to drowning (Figure O3).

Drowning deaths in ocean / harbour locations occur all year round with peaks in February and April (Figure O2).

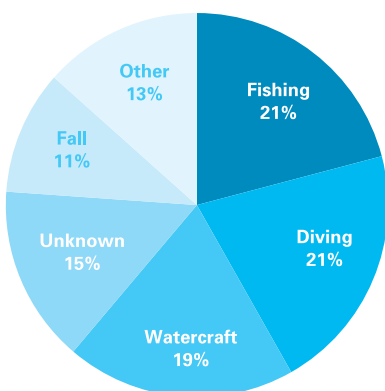
**FIGURE O1.** Ocean / Harbour drowning deaths by age group, Australia, 2008/09



**FIGURE O2.** Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths, Month of Incident, Australia, 2008/09



**FIGURE O3.** Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths, Activity Immediately Prior, Australia, 2008/09

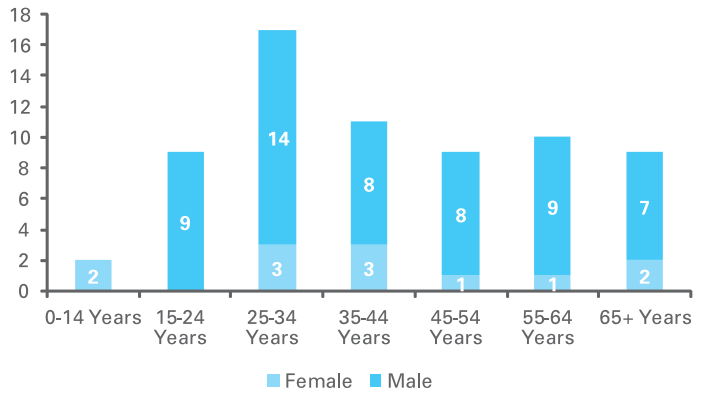


Always wear a lifejacket when on the water.

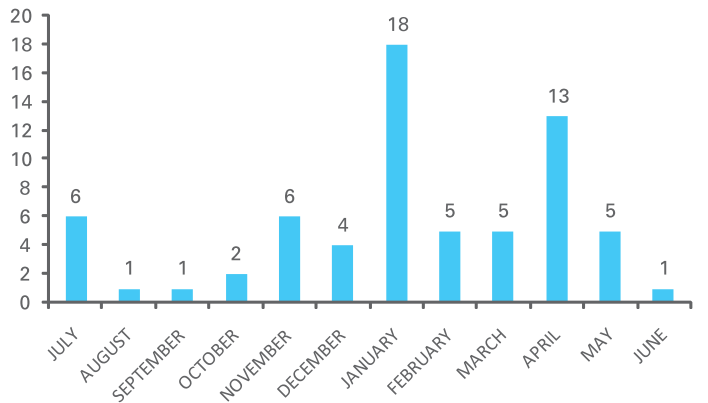
## BEACHES

There were 67 drowning deaths at beach locations and along the shoreline last year, the average age being 42 years (median = 40; range = 2 to 86 years) (Figure B1). In over a third (39%) of cases the person was in the water swimming or undertaking leisure activities at the time of the incident, and in nearly a fifth of cases (19%) the activity is unknown often because the person was alone at the time (Figure B3). Drowning deaths at beaches occurred all year round with a significant peak in January and smaller spike in April, corresponding with traditional holiday periods (Figure B2).

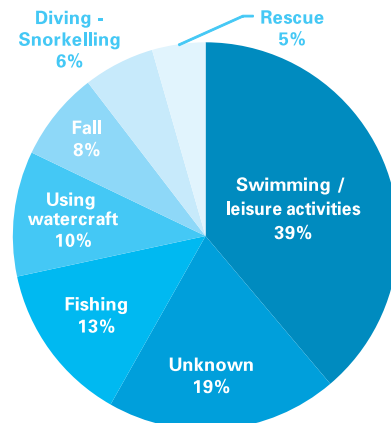
**FIGURE B1.** Beach Drowning Deaths by Age Group, Australia, 2008/09



**FIGURE B2.** Beach Drowning Deaths, Month of Incident, Australia, 2008/09



**FIGURE B3.** Beach Drowning Deaths, Activity Immediately Prior, Australia, 2008/09



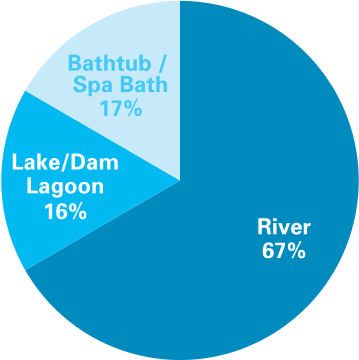
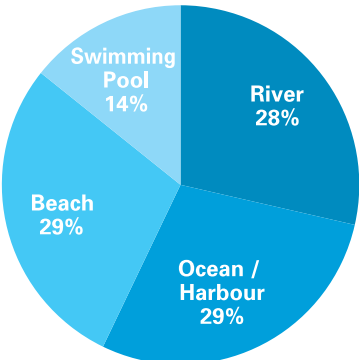
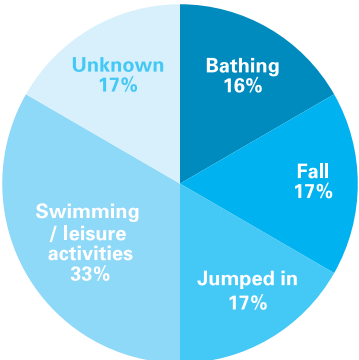
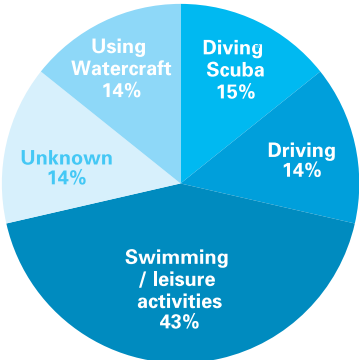
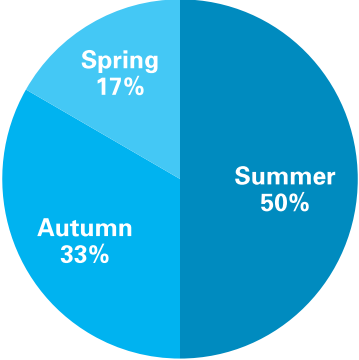
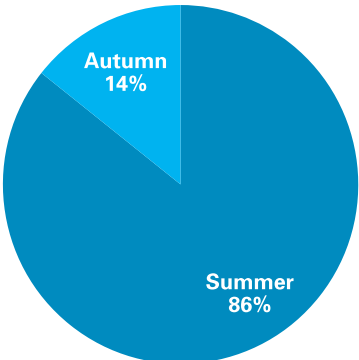
Always participate in recreational activities with friends.

## CHILDREN: 0-17 YEARS OF AGE

Children represent the most vulnerable group in relation to drowning, particularly those under 5 years of age. However, childhood and adolescence remain the best time to prepare children for a life of safe aquatic participation and fun. The strategies used to prevent child drowning change with age, but it is essential that foundation skills and drills are developed at a young age.

|                 | 0-4 YEARS (N=32)   | 5-9 YEARS (N=5)  |
|-----------------|--|--|
| LOCATION        | <p>Swimming Pool 60%</p> <p>Lake / Dam / Lagoon 16%</p> <p>Beach 6%</p> <p>Ocean / Harbour 6%</p> <p>River 6%</p> <p>Bathing / Spa Bath 3%</p> <p>Other / Unknown 3%</p> | <p>River 40%</p> <p>Swimming Pool 20%</p> <p>Bathing / Spa Bath 20%</p> <p>Other / Unknown 20%</p>       |
| ACTIVITY        | <p>Fall 85%</p> <p>Swimming / leisure activities 6%</p> <p>Unknown 6%</p> <p>Bathing 3%</p>  | <p>Swimming / leisure activities 40%</p> <p>Bathing 20%</p> <p>Fall 20%</p> <p>Surfing 20%</p>           |
| SEASON          | <p>Summer 41%</p> <p>Spring 41%</p> <p>Autumn 12%</p> <p>Winter 6%</p>   | <p>Spring 40%</p> <p>Winter 40%</p> <p>Summer 20%</p>  |
| Super-vision    | Parents - within arms' reach all of the time, with all of your attention.  | Increasing distance, but always within eyesight and ready for action.                                    |
| Rescue Skills   | Parents - Learn resuscitation.   | Parent - Lifesaving and rescue skills.<br>Child - Personal survival skills; treading water and floating. |
| Restrict Access | Ensure the pool is fenced with a self closing and self latching gate. If living on a farm or large property provide a safe area for children to play.                    | Rules and behaviours established and reinforced often.   |
| Water Skills    | Water familiarisation and confidence - preparatory skills.   | Learn to swim and water safety - basic foundation skills.  |

There were 50 children aged 0-17 years who drowned in Australia this year, nearly two thirds (64%) were under 5 years of age. The most common location changes from swimming pools for children under 5 years of age to rivers for most other age groups. Common activities immediately prior were playing near water and then falling in, followed by being in the water swimming or undertaking leisure activities. The majority of drowning deaths occurred during summer, followed by spring.

| 10-14 YEARS (N=6)   | 15-17 YEARS (N=7)  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
|---|--|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|--------------------|-----|---|----------|------------|--------|---|----------|------------|-------------------------------|-----|---------------|-----|----------|-----|------------------|-----|---------|-----|----------|
|  <table border="1"> <caption>Location of Drowning (10-14 Years)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Location</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>River</td> <td>67%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Lake/Dam Lagoon</td> <td>16%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bathtub / Spa Bath</td> <td>17%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>  | Location   | Percentage         | River                         | 67% | Lake/Dam Lagoon | 16% | Bathtub / Spa Bath | 17% |  <table border="1"> <caption>Location of Drowning (15-17 Years)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Location</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>River</td> <td>28%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Beach</td> <td>29%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ocean / Harbour</td> <td>29%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Swimming Pool</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Location | Percentage | River  | 28%   | Beach    | 29%        | Ocean / Harbour               | 29% | Swimming Pool | 14% | LOCATION |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Location  | Percentage   |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| River   | 67%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Lake/Dam Lagoon   | 16%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Bathtub / Spa Bath  | 17%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Location  | Percentage   |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| River   | 28%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Beach   | 29%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Ocean / Harbour   | 29%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Swimming Pool   | 14%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
|  <table border="1"> <caption>Activity of Drowning (10-14 Years)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Activity</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Swimming / leisure activities</td> <td>33%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jumped in</td> <td>17%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bathing</td> <td>16%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fall</td> <td>17%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Unknown</td> <td>17%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Activity   | Percentage         | Swimming / leisure activities | 33% | Jumped in       | 17% | Bathing            | 16% | Fall  | 17%      | Unknown    | 17%    |  <table border="1"> <caption>Activity of Drowning (15-17 Years)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Activity</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Swimming / leisure activities</td> <td>43%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Diving Scuba</td> <td>15%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Driving</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Using Watercraft</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Unknown</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Activity | Percentage | Swimming / leisure activities | 43% | Diving Scuba  | 15% | Driving  | 14% | Using Watercraft | 14% | Unknown | 14% | ACTIVITY |
| Activity  | Percentage   |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Swimming / leisure activities   | 33%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Jumped in   | 17%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Bathing   | 16%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Fall  | 17%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Unknown   | 17%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Activity  | Percentage   |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Swimming / leisure activities   | 43%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Diving Scuba  | 15%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Driving   | 14%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Using Watercraft  | 14%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Unknown   | 14%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
|  <table border="1"> <caption>Season of Drowning (10-14 Years)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Season</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Summer</td> <td>50%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autumn</td> <td>33%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spring</td> <td>17%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>  | Season   | Percentage         | Summer                        | 50% | Autumn          | 33% | Spring             | 17% |  <table border="1"> <caption>Season of Drowning (15-17 Years)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Season</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Summer</td> <td>86%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autumn</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>   | Season   | Percentage | Summer | 86%   | Autumn   | 14%        | SEASON                        |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Season  | Percentage   |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Summer  | 50%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Autumn  | 33%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Spring  | 17%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Season  | Percentage   |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Summer  | 86%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| Autumn  | 14%  |                    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| <p>Increasing independence but physically checking up on a regular basis.</p>   | <p>Supervision of and by peer group.</p>   | Super-<br>vision   |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| <p>Parent - Lifesaving and rescue skills.<br/>Child - Personal survival and basic rescue skills; reach to rescue and rope throw.</p>  | <p>Child - Personal survival, lifesaving rescue and emergency skills; Bronze Medallion and resuscitation training.</p> | Rescue<br>Skills   |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| <p>Setting rules and boundaries, guiding the selection of appropriate locations and activities.</p>   | <p>Setting rules and boundaries, providing skills for selecting appropriate locations.</p>                             | Restrict<br>Access |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |
| <p>Swim and Survive - essential water safety swimming and foundation skills.</p>  | <p>Lifesaving, swimming and water safety - skills for aquatic activities.</p>  | Water<br>Skills    |                               |     |                 |     |                    |     |   |          |            |        |   |          |            |                               |     |               |     |          |     |                  |     |         |     |          |

## DROWNING DEATHS BY AGE AND GENDER

Last year there were 234 (77%) male and 68 (23%) female drowning deaths, making males over three times more likely to drown than females.

### Drowning deaths are up by 9% on the 5 year average.

This increase should be considered cautiously as there are still a large number of cases open (84%), i.e. being investigated by State and Territory Coroners.

The average age was 41 years (Median = 40; range = 1-91). There was an increase in the number of drowning deaths against the 5 year average in all except for the 5-14 years, and the 45-54 years age groups.

The largest increases on the 5 year average were in the 65+ years (25%), 25-34 years (20%) and 15-24 years (15%) age groups (Figure 3).

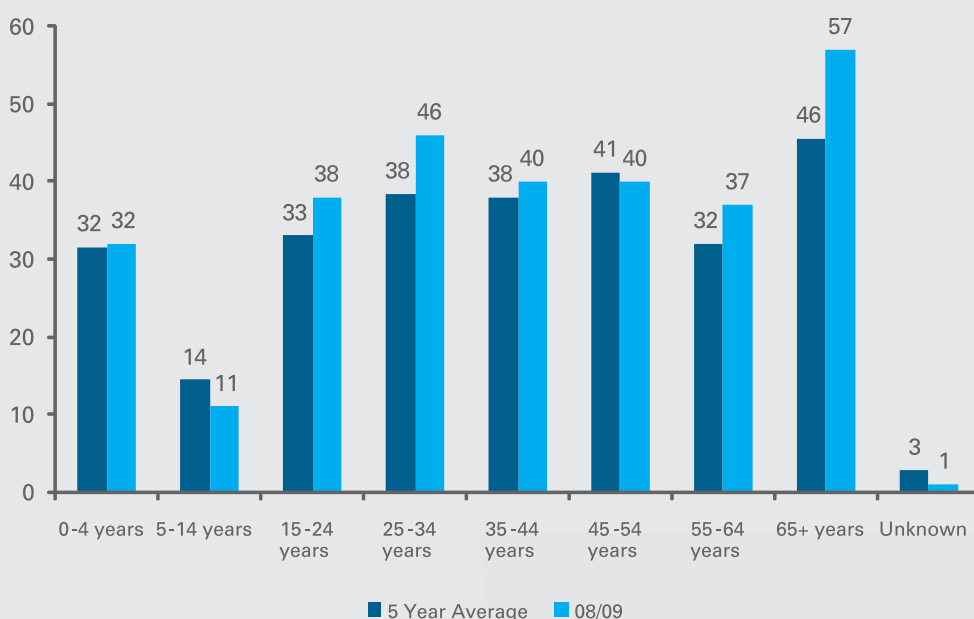
## SNAPSHOT: 18-34 YEAR OLD MALES

Men aged 18-34 years and alcohol have been identified as a priority in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008-2011 and while information about alcohol consumption is not available for this report the following gives a snapshot.

This year (2008/09) there were 66 drowning deaths in males aged 18-34 years at a range of locations, particularly beaches (32%), rivers (24%), and oceans (20%).

The most common activity was swimming or undertaking recreational activities in the water (56%) and two-thirds (64%) of drowning deaths occurred during summer and autumn.

FIGURE 3. Drowning Death by Age Group, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2008/09



## CASE STUDY: HOME POOL SAFETY

Home swimming pools are the most dangerous aquatic location for young children and have been recognised as a priority area in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008-2011. As such the Royal Life Saving Society has initiated a campaign to make this weekend your home pool safety weekend and download a home pool safety checklist to check your pool and make it safer.

The checklist looks at:

- The gate
- The fence
- Around the pool
- Emergency preparation
- Supervision
- Electricity safety
- Chemical safety

For more information visit [www.homepoolsafety.com.au](http://www.homepoolsafety.com.au)



## DROWNING DEATHS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

### CHILDREN: 0-4 YEARS

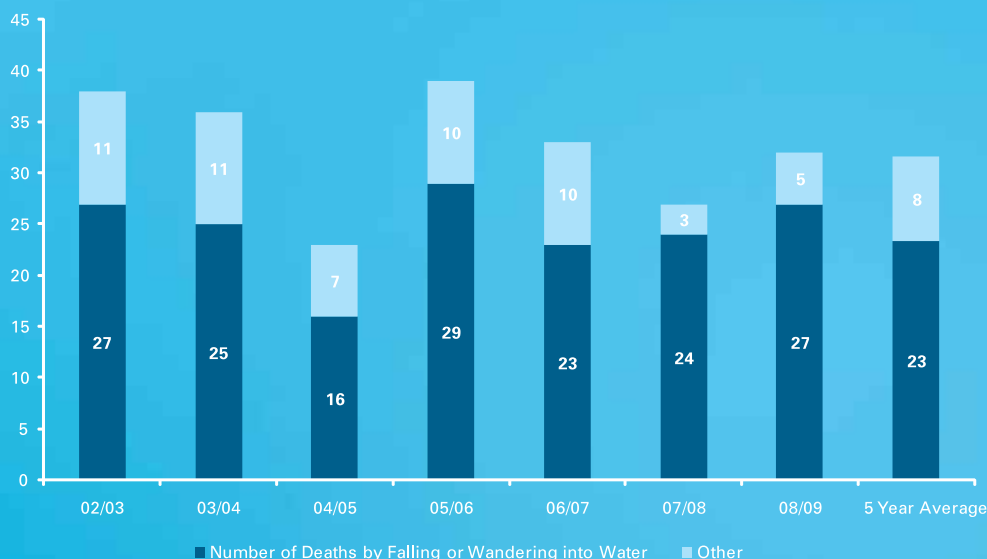
The majority of drowning deaths of young children resulted from the child falling or wandering into the water.

For more information visit [www.keepwatch.com.au](http://www.keepwatch.com.au)

There were 32 drowning deaths in young children in 2008/09, which is consistent with the 5 year average (Figure 4). Royal Life Saving believes that everyone can be a lifesaver; particular parents of young children, who can follow the four **KEEP WATCH** actions:

- Supervise young children constantly (within arms' reach) whenever they are in, on or near water.
- Restrict a young child's access to water either by putting a barrier around the water or around the child.
- Undertake water familiarisation with your child, to help you become aware of your child's abilities and the potential dangers around water.
- Learn resuscitation so you are able to respond in an emergency.

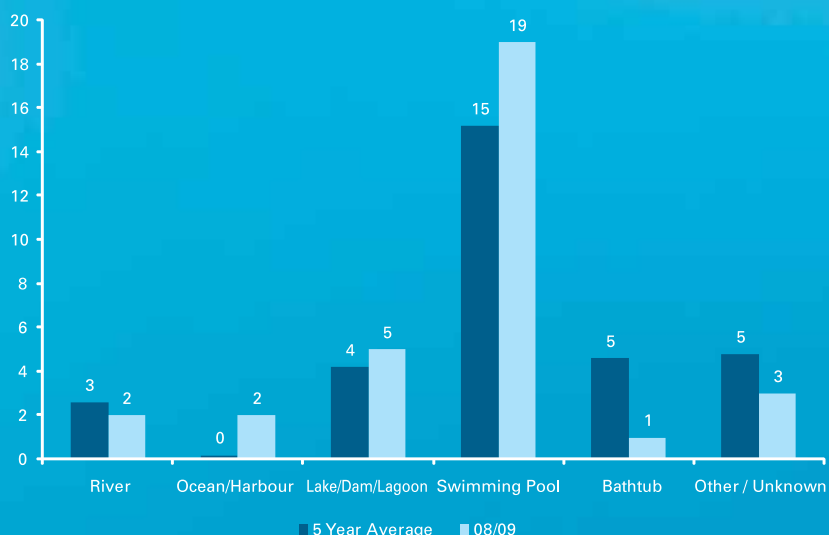
FIGURE 4. Drowning Deaths of Young Children 0-4 Years, Australia 2002/03 – 2008/09, 5 year Average



## LOCATION OF CHILD DROWNING DEATHS

The majority of drowning deaths of young children resulted from the child falling or wandering into the water (Figure 4). The swimming pool was again the most common location, with all except one a result of falling or wandering into the pool area. The next most common locations were lakes/dams/lagoons (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. Location of Drowning Deaths, Young Children 0-4 years, 5 Year Average, 2008/09

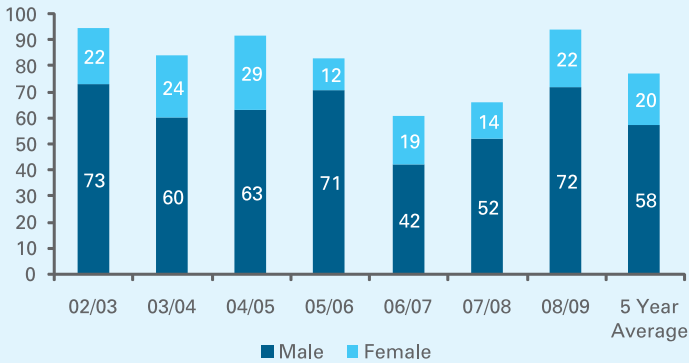


# OLDER AUSTRALIANS 55+ YEARS

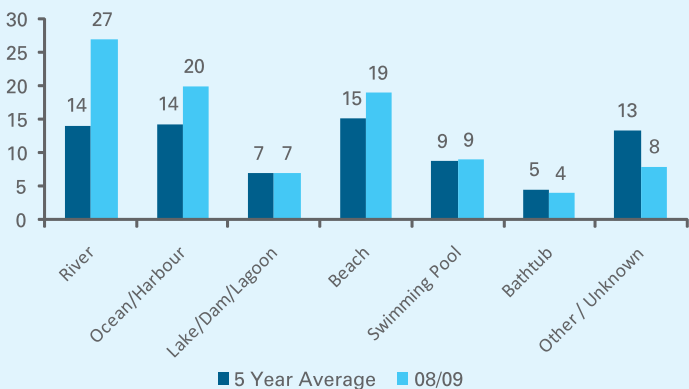
## Drowning Deaths in Older Australians

There were 94 drowning deaths in Australians aged over 55 years in 2008/09, which is up by 16 (21%) on the five year average of 78 (Figure 4). Of the 94 drowning deaths, 77% were male (Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6.** Drowning Deaths of Older Australians 55+ years, Australia 2002/03 to 2008/09, 5 Year Average



**FIGURE 7.** Location of Drowning Deaths of Older Australians 55+ years, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2008/09

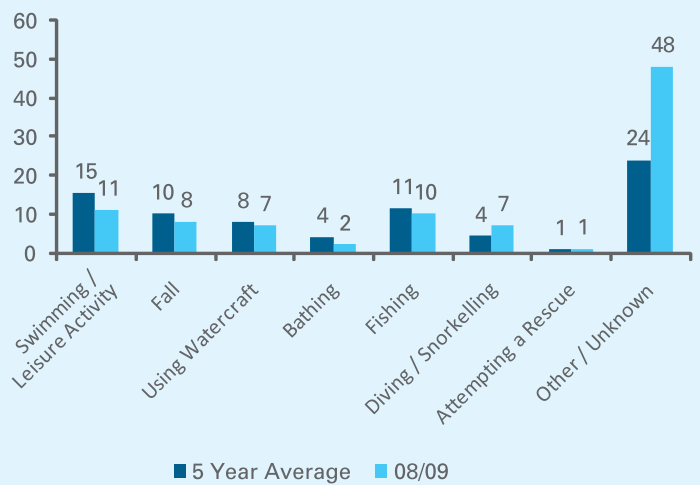


## Drowning by Location and Activity of Older Australians

Older people drown in a diverse range of aquatic settings, requiring them to have a broad range of lifesaving skills and knowledge to stay safe. River (29%), ocean/harbour (21%), beach (20%) and swimming pool (10%) were common locations for drowning deaths (Figure 7).

This year over half (51%) of activities immediately prior to drowning were unknown or included other activities such as driving through flooded roads, jumping into the water, undertaking maintenance or a plane crash. Other common activities prior to drowning were swimming / leisure activity (12%) and falling-in following walking or playing near the water (9%) (Figure 8).

**FIGURE 8.** Drowning Deaths by Activity, Older Australians 55+ years, Australia, 5 Year Average, 2008/09



## CASE STUDY: GREY MEDALLION

Older people have been identified as a priority area of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008-2011. It is critical to note that by 2020 there will be over 7 million people living in Australia aged over 55 years.

The Royal Life Saving Society has developed the Grey Medallion to provide water safety and lifesaving skills aimed at reducing the drowning rates and encouraging a healthy, independent and active life style.

There are four main components of the program:

- Water Safety Knowledge
- Resuscitation and Emergency Care
- Aquatic Exercise
- Personal Survival and lifesaving skills

For more information visit [www.greymedallion.com.au](http://www.greymedallion.com.au)



# QUICK FACTS ON DROWNING

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## Young children 0-4 Years

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- 32 young children 0-4 years (11% of all drowning deaths)
- 13 (41%) were males
- 19 (59%) in swimming pools
- 27 (84%) fell or wandered into water
- 13 (41%) occurred during summer

## Children 5-14 Years

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- 11 children 5-14 years (4% of all drowning deaths)
- 8 (73%) were males
- 6 (55%) in rivers
- 4 (36%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water
- 4 (36%) occurred during the summer

## People 15-34 Years

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- 84 people 15-34 years (28% of all drowning deaths)
- 73 (87%) were males
- 26 (31%) at the beach
- 20 (24%) in a river
- 24 (29%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water prior to drowning
- 10 (12%) following a fall into water
- 9 (11%) while using watercraft
- 35 (42%) occurred during the summer

## People 35-54 Years

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- 80 people 35-54 years (26% of all drowning deaths)
- 67 (84%) were males
- 26 (33%) in ocean/harbour locations
- 21 (26%) in a river
- 20 (25%) at the beach
- 14 (18%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water prior to drowning
- 11 (14%) were using watercraft prior to drowning
- 28 (35%) occurred during summer

## People 55+ years

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- 94 people aged 55 years (31% of all drowning deaths)
- 72 (77%) were males
- 27 (29%) in a river
- 20 (21%) in ocean/harbour locations
- 19 (20%) at the beach
- 11 (12%) were swimming or undertaking leisure activities in water prior to drowning
- 8 (9%) following a fall into water
- 36 (38%) activity was unknown
- 24 (36%) occurred during summer

## Acknowledgements

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- The Australian Bureau of Statistics
- The National Coroners Information System
- State and Territory Coroners
- Queensland Child Deaths Case Review Committee
- Media Monitors
- Jimmy Too Design & Photography

Note: There was 1 case where the age was unknown at the time of production of this report.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER



**Royal Life Saving**

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