

CHILD DEATH REGISTER KEY FINDINGS 2020–21

Child drowning facts and figures

Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

Overview

There were 10 drowning deaths of children and young people in 2020–21.ⁱ

Children aged 1–4 years are most at risk of drowning, predominately in backyard swimming pools and rural water hazards.

Other risk groups identified:

- infants and young children if unsupervised while bathing
- young children around pools at the homes of extended family, friends, or neighbours
- young people who were international visitors or had recently moved to Australia.

Trends

On average, **9 children under the age of 5** drown in Queensland each year. An average of 4 children aged 5-17 years drown each year.

The Queensland Child Death Register records all child deaths in Queensland. Between July 2004 and June 2021, there were 240 drowning deaths of children aged between 0 and 17 years. Over the last 5-year period the drowning mortality rate was 1.2 per 100,000 population aged 0–17 years.

National comparison

In 2019, Queensland had the highest number and rate of child drownings of any Australian state or territory.ⁱⁱ Queensland's rate of child drowning was 1.5 per 100,000 population, whereas the next highest rate was in New South Wales with 0.4 per 100,000 population.

By age

Children under the age of 5 are particularly vulnerable. As illustrated in Figure 2, children aged 1-4 years make up 56% of all child drownings while a further 12% are aged under 1.

Figure 2: Drowning deaths by age
Drowning deaths in the 5-year period to June 2021

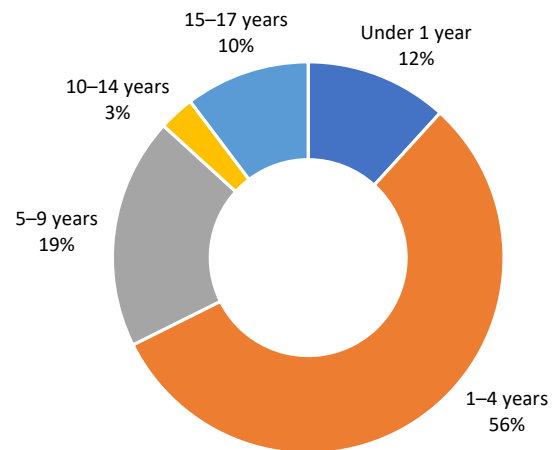
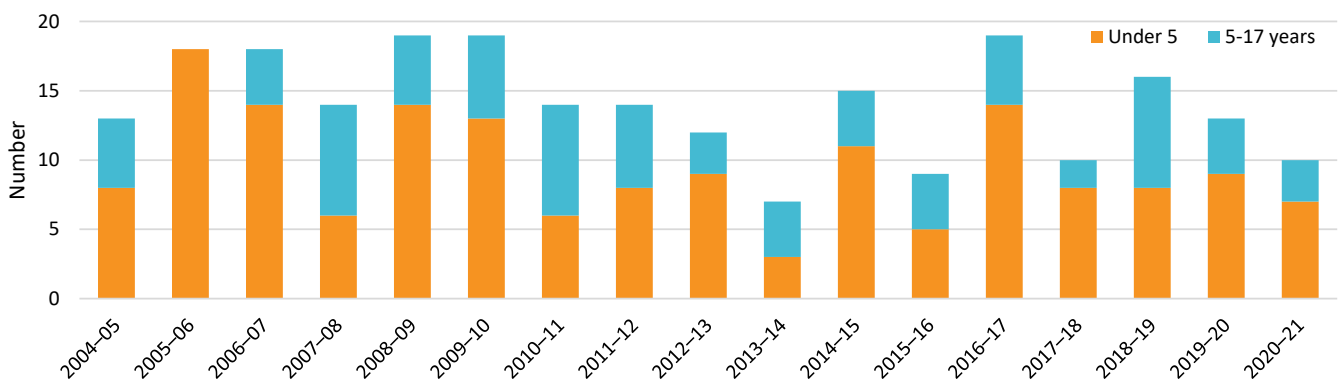


Figure 1: Drowning deaths of children and young people in Queensland



Children aged under 5

In the last 5 years, 46 children aged under 5 drowned in Queensland. As indicated in Figure 3, 50% of these deaths occurred in swimming pools.

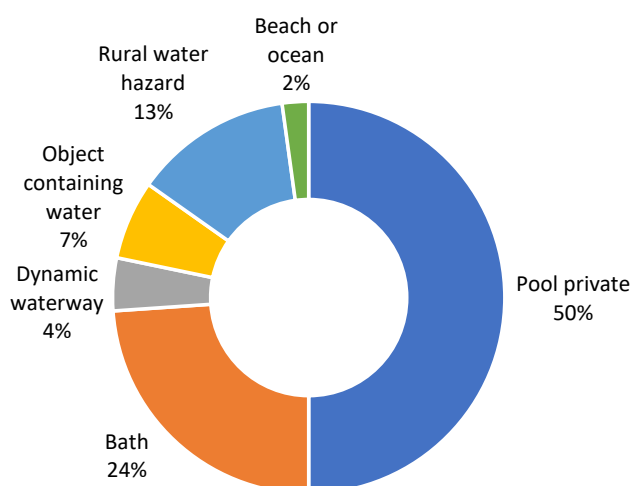
Pool fencing was non-compliant in 22 of the 23 incidents of private pool drownings. Non-compliant fencing includes the absence of fencing, fencing or gate defects or propping pool gates open.

Pool drowning incidents where fencing was non-compliant and/or gate propped open **96%**

Pools aren't the only risk to children under 5 years, with 24% of drownings occurring in bath tubs and 13% in rural water hazards (such as dams and water troughs).

Figure 3: Drowning hazards for under 5s

Drowning deaths of children aged under 5 in the 5-year period to June 2021



Risk factors

- Leaving children unsupervised for any period of time, even just for a few moments, when they are known to be in a pool or a bath tub.
- Inadequate supervision of children when they are known to be in or around water.
- Failing to have a pool fence that meets the legislative requirements.
- Keeping the pool gate propped open.
- Having objects nearby that children can climb to open the pool gate.

Key prevention messages

- Children need to be continuously and actively supervised by a capable supervisor when in or near water. For children under the age of 5, this means being within arm's reach at all times.
- The presence of other children or the use of flotation devices should not take the place of active adult supervision.
- Compliant pool fencing saves lives.
- Reliance on pool fences alone is not enough to prevent children accessing pools.
- Teach children water safety and awareness. This means teaching children how to swim, educating children about the risks of water hazards and reinforcing rules about entering pool areas.
- Remove toys from in and around the pool area to reduce the temptation for children to gain access to the pool.
- Do not place furniture or equipment close to pool fences as children may climb to access pool area.
- Have a safe play area for children away from pools or other water hazards.
- Never leave children unsupervised in the bath.
- Be aware of children's access to non-pool water hazards, particularly bath tubs, buckets of water, or other bodies of water.
- Learn how to respond in the case of an emergency.

More information

This fact sheet provides summary information from the *Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people Queensland 2020–21*. Information on methodology, sources and definitions can be found in the report.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission's (QFCC) annual reports on child deaths, 17-year data tables and the latest Australian states and territories and New Zealand child death statistics can be found at <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/preventing-child-injury-death/child-death-reports-data>

Data for prevention activities

The QFCC works with researchers and government agencies to raise community awareness and develop prevention programs and policies, by identifying risk factors, trends and emerging safety hazards.

The QFCC can provide detailed child death data to genuine researchers and organisations at no cost.

Email child_death_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au

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ⁱ The Queensland Child Death Register is based on death registrations recorded by the Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

ⁱⁱ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2022), *Australian and New Zealand Child Death Statistics 2019*.