



Major sponsor:



In partnership with:



Supported by:

- Plunket Society
- New Zealand Transport Agency
- Ministry of Transport
- Age Concern New Zealand
- Rural Women New Zealand
- Office of the Children's Commissioner
- New Zealand Police
- Injury Prevention Network of Aotearoa New Zealand
- NZ Injury Prevention Strategy Secretariat
- Maori Women's Welfare League
- Brain Injury Association
- Community Coalitions

## Factsheet

# DROWNING

- Childhood drowning is silent and fast.
- Typically, childhood drowning happens when children are left unattended in or near water.
- Following submersion a child can lose consciousness after 90 – 120 seconds. Irreversible brain damage occurs after 4 to 6 minutes of submersion. Therefore immediate commencement of CPR is vital.

## Key facts

### Deaths

- Drowning is one of the major causes of injury-related death to New Zealand children, accounting for 16.5% of all fatal unintentional injuries to children aged 0-14 years.<sup>1</sup>
  - Each year, on average, 15 children aged 0 - 14 years of age drown.<sup>1</sup>
  - Toddlers and young children aged less than 5 years are most at risk.<sup>1</sup>
- following a water submersion incident.
- Of these 187 children 119 (64%) were under five years and 68 children (36%) were aged 5 - 14.<sup>1</sup>
  - Overall, boys are almost twice as likely to drown as girls.
  - Of 78 children who drowned (during 1999 – 2003) 51 were boys and 27 were girls (Figure 1).

### Hospitalisations

- Each year, on average, 37 children are hospitalised following a near drowning event.<sup>1</sup>
- Injuries sustained by children who survive near drowning can be devastating. They may suffer severe permanent neurological disability with lifelong consequences for the children and their families.

### Age, Gender and Ethnicity

- Of the 78 children who drowned during the five year period 1999-2003:
  - 53 children were under 5 years of age (68%).
  - 25 children were aged 5 - 14 (32%).<sup>1</sup>
- During the five year period 2001-2005, 187 children were hospitalised

Age Group	Boys drowned	Girls drowned
0 - 4 years	33	20
5 - 9 years	6	4
10 -14 years	12	3

**Figure 1:** Age groups and gender of children who drowned 1999-2003<sup>1</sup>

- All New Zealand children are at risk of drowning. The pattern of risk for different ethnicities varies according to age. For children under five:
  - Maori appear to be at increased risk. Tamariki Maori make up 24% of the under 5 population and account for 27% of the drownings.
  - Europeans make up about 62% of the under 5 population and account for 57% of the drownings.
  - Pasifika children make up 13% of the under 5's and account for 8% of the drownings.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

### Paul's story

22-month-old Paul was pulled unconscious from the family pool and taken to hospital. He survived with permanent brain damage and his needs have totally changed the life of the family. He will never walk, he can speak only a few words, his sight is impaired and he cannot chew or swallow. He has to be fed through a tube. His doctors and therapists are not optimistic about his prospects and he is likely to deteriorate physically as the years pass.

○ For children aged 5 -14 years:

- Maori children make up 23% of children 5 - 14 years and account for 21% of drownings in this age group.
- Europeans make up about 62% of children 5 - 14 years and account for 47% of drownings in this age group.
- Pasifika children appear to be most at risk as they make up 11% of this population and 13% of the drownings.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

### Location of Child Drownings

The locations in which children drown reflect their developmental ability and the environments in which they spend time.

#### Toddler drownings – the under fives

Most babies under 1 year who drown, do so in the bath. As toddlers grow other water hazards around the home become more accessible to them and this increases their risk of drowning around the home and in the wider environment.

DrownBase™<sup>2</sup> data for the years 2000 – 2004 shows that of 49 children under 5 who drowned:

- 16 drowned in home pools and spa pools (33%)
- 7 drowned in the bath (14%).

Other sites around the home where children under 5 drowned included buckets, farm troughs and paddling pools.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond the home, young children drown in lakes, ponds, drains, rivers, creeks, streams and in public and thermal pools.<sup>2</sup>

### Older children: 5 – 14 years

As children grow older they become more adventurous, spending more time outside the home environment. Boys, in particular, take part in more risky behaviours in and around the water.

The most common sites for drowning for this age group are rivers, creeks and streams. DrownBase™ data identifies rivers, creeks and streams as the location of 55% of the child drownings for children aged 5 - 14. Other sites included beaches (16%) public and thermal pools, harbours and estuaries.<sup>2</sup>

### Active Supervision

*Adults need to be actively vigilant with all children around water all of the time – remaining within arm's reach of children under 5. When a baby is in the bath an adult needs to maintain hand contact with the infant at all times.*

---

### References:

- 1 National Injury Query System at [www.otago.ac.nz/ipru/stats](http://www.otago.ac.nz/ipru/stats), 2007 (Data for Unintentional Injury)
- 2 DrownBase™ Statistical Response October 2006. Water Safety New Zealand: data from 2000 -2004
- 3 Data supplied by Statistics NZ: Census 2006
- 4 Statistical Standard for Ethnicity 2005. Statistics New Zealand at [www.stats.govt.nz/](http://www.stats.govt.nz/)