

Safekids New Zealand Position Statement on Swimming Pool Fencing



Overview

Drowning in swimming pools is a significant cause of preventable deaths and hospitalisations among children in New Zealand.[1-3] Young children are at increased risk of drowning in home swimming pools; 61% of those who drown in home swimming pools in New Zealand are aged under 5 years.[4]

There is a lot of evidence that demonstrates that completely enclosing a swimming pool with four sided fencing and isolating it from the home is the most effective way to prevent young children from drowning in home swimming pools.

Safekids NZ affirms the recommendations of the Paediatric Society of New Zealand [6] and joins the Paediatric Society in recommending:

New Zealand Government legislation requires the effective fencing of both newly constructed and existing swimming pools; and this legislation includes monitoring (a pool safety 'warrant of fitness') and education and enforcement provisions to maintain the highest level of safety for children.

Water safety education programmes for the public include the information that home swimming pools need an effective barrier (i.e., be compliant with the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act) at all times and that young children must always be closely supervised by an adult when they are near any body of water.

**Safekids New Zealand
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Safekids NZ Position

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There is a lot of evidence that demonstrates that completely enclosing a swimming pool with four sided fencing and isolating it from the home is the most effective way to prevent young children from drowning in home swimming pools. Pool fences are specially designed to have dynamic and secure self latching gates or doors, and are also designed so that children cannot easily get over, under or through them.[5]

No other methods have been shown to be as effective at preventing children drowning as a barrier fence.[6]

New Zealand evidence demonstrates that compulsory fencing of swimming pools through the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act (1987) has reduced the number of children drowning in New Zealand swimming pools.[3] The Act requires people with swimming pools, including spa pools, to put 1.2 metre high fences around them. The fence needs to be an effective barrier that restricts access to the pool by children under six years of age. The fence must not have any footholds or climbable rails and must have self-closing and latching gates. Before the introduction of the Act, an average of 11.5 children per year drowned in home swimming pools. This reduced to an average of 2.6 per year (over the seven year period 2002-2008) after the implementation of the Act, even though the number of home swimming pools increased by approximately 30%.[3]

Most children who drown in home swimming pools do so when they are able to access swimming pools that are not compliant with the Swimming Pools Act. Non-compliance occurred through the deterioration of pool fences, failing gates and gate latches, illegal modifications to pool fences and gates being propped open.[3]

Regular quality checks on pool fences can help reduce the risk of non-compliance with the Act, however there is variable checking of fence compliance across New Zealand. A survey of Local Authorities suggests that less than half had a programme for re-inspecting swimming pool fences for ongoing compliance with the Act.[3]

To prevent children drowning, combinations of interventions are important, including legislation, education and changing the environment to reduce the risk of drowning.[7] Public education is recommended where children are at increased risk of drowning. [3]

Supervision of children around swimming pools is essential, and pool fences do not reduce the need for active supervision. Young children should not be left alone in or around a swimming or spa pool, even for a few seconds. Children should be kept in direct sight at all times in and around swimming pools. Children under 5 years should be within arm's reach at all times.

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References

1. Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee., *A six year review of drowning of children in Private Pools in New Zealand (unpublished report)*. 2008.
2. Coggan, C., et al., *Drowning in New Zealand: A study of mortality and morbidity data for all ages*. Centre Report Series No 90. 2004, Injury Prevention Research Centre, University of Auckland: Auckland.
3. Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee. and T. Te Ropu Arotake Auau Mate o te Hunga Tamariki, *Fifth Report to the Minister of Health: Reporting Mortality 2002-2008*. 2009, Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee: Wellington.
4. Water Safety New Zealand., *Drowning Fact Sheet. Environment - Home Pools*. 2010, Water Safety New Zealand: Wellington.
5. Thompson, D. and F. Rivara, *Pool fencing for preventing drowning in children*. Cochrane Database Syst Rev, 1998(1): p. Art. No. CD001047.
6. Paediatric Society of New Zealand., *Position Statement on the Provision of Swimming Pool Fencing*. 2010, Paediatric Society of New Zealand: Wellington.
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