

# Safety Fact Sheet

## Swimming Pool and Spa Safety

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### What are swimming pools and spas?

Swimming pools and spas are structures containing water, used for swimming and other water activities.

This fact sheet refers to in ground and above ground pools and spas, with a depth of at least 300mm. For information on inflatable or portable pools, please see our fact sheet [Inflatable or Portable Swimming Pools](#).

### How may a child be injured?

#### Drowning and near drowning

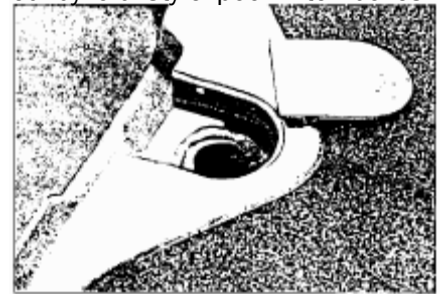
- Children may fall into the water and drown after gaining access through an open gate, faulty fence or by climbing on nearby furniture.
- Children may fall into water while trying to retrieve something.
- Children using floatation devices may lean forward and tip over, causing their head to go under water.
- Children who get into trouble whilst swimming may become submerged and drown if an adult is not within arms reach.
- Children's hair may get sucked into a spa jet, causing a child to be held under water.
- Near drowning can result in permanent brain injury.

#### Infection

- Children may become ill when pool or spa water is left uncleaned for long periods of time.

#### Other life threatening injuries

- Children may be seriously injured or disembowelled by old style pool filter boxes. These are now banned. See Image below.



(Image courtesy of NSW Office of Fair Trading)

### How common are these injuries?

Drowning was the second leading cause of injury death to children aged less than 14 years living in New South Wales between 1998 and 2002. In that time, drowning was the leading cause of death for children aged 1-4 years<sup>1</sup>. In 2008, 73% of drowning deaths to children aged less than 14 years in NSW, occurred in swimming pools. Of these deaths, 80% occurred after the child had fallen or wandered into the water<sup>2</sup>. Pools are an obvious risk but children can also drown in baths, spas, dams, rivers, creeks, garden ponds and nappy buckets. It takes as little as 5cm of water and an unsupervised child for a drowning to occur.

While it is known that pool filter boxes have been associated with serious injuries and deaths in Australia and the United States of America, there are no published statistics currently available.

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### Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for swimming pool safety?

The law, *NSW Swimming Pools Act 1992*, states that all swimming pool fences in Australia must comply with the Australian Standard (AS 1926). This Act requires the owner of the grounds on which an outdoor swimming pool is situated, to make sure that a child resistant barrier surrounds the pool.

This fence or barrier must separate the pool from any premise whether public or private. Indoor swimming pools must also have child resistant barriers restricting entry to the pool. Spa pools are exempted from needing a child resistant barrier or fence, so long as access to the water contained in the spa is restricted with a child resistant barrier when the spa is not in use (eg: lockable lid).

The standard swimming pool fence is 1.2m high with a self-closing/self-latching child resistant gate. The vertical bars must be no more than 100mm apart and any horizontal bars at least 900mm apart.

The law, *Fair Trading Regulation 2007, Gazette No. 108*, states that all swimming pool water recirculation systems sold in Australia must comply with the Australian Standard (AS 1926.3 – 2003).

### Remember:

- Always supervise children when in and around water and **stay within arm's reach**.
- Never leave another child responsible for a young child in a swimming pool or spa, no matter how confident you are about the ability of the older child/sibling to watch the young child. Children are not capable of such responsibility.
- Familiarise your children with water.
- Learn infant and child resuscitation.
- Regularly check the swimming pool fence and gate.
- Ensure the pool gate is always closed and never propped or left open.
- Keep pot plants and other furniture away from the swimming pool fence so that they can not be used to climb over the pool fence to gain access to the pool.
- Always leave your filter cover on so that children may not gain access to it.
- Display a CPR chart near the pool or spa.
- Ensure that pool chemicals are stored in a safe place, at least 1.5m above ground level, away from children.

<sup>1</sup> Schmertmann M, Finch C, Williamson AM. (2004) NSW Injury Profile: A review of injury data from 1998 – 2002. NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre, UNSW, Sydney.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Life Saving Society of Australia (2008) The 2008 NSW Drowning Report.

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