

20 May 2005
Media Release
For immediate release



Water Safety Report

A new report shows pre-schoolers have an alarmingly high rate of drowning in New Zealand and despite tougher laws on pool fencing, most still drown in unfenced pools at home.

The report Circumstances surrounding drowning in those under 25 in New Zealand (1980-2002) was released today by the Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee (CYMRC) and Water Safety New Zealand.

New Zealand has the highest rate of youth drowning (1-14 years old) compared to other OECD countries. Drowning is also the second leading cause of injury death for youth in New Zealand.

Professor Barry Taylor who is the chairman of the ministerial CYMRC says " While there has been a significant drop in the number of drownings over the 23-year study period, there is ample room for improvement."

"The study shows 67% of infants (0-12 months) who drowned did so in the bath while most pre-schooler drownings (1-4 years) happened in home swimming pools. Any child's death is tragic, but what makes these statistics particularly sad is that in many cases the drownings may have been preventable if the child was properly supervised."

"The consistent outcome from the study was that a lack of supervision of infants and young children around water is the major reason for such a devastating drowning toll. It is imperative that caregivers ensure uncompromised care and attention is given while infants and children are at home, be it in the bath, by putting the bucket of soaking clothes on a bench, and making sure all entry points to the swimming pool or spa pool are secure."

"No child should be left alone in a bath under the age of 4 years. The use of bath seats or flotation rings do not keep a baby safe in a bath, nor are they a substitute for constant supervision" says Professor Barry Taylor.

The study highlights that greater work needs to be carried out on ensuring all home pools are fenced in accordance with the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act 1987.

Key findings of the report:

- A total of 1,334 people aged 0–24 years drowned in New Zealand from January 1980 – December 2002 inclusive. Of these drownings, 1,280 (96%) were unintentional, 44 were suicide, and ten homicide.
- The number of deaths by drowning is higher for males than for females for all ages. The overall male to female ratio of 3.2:1.
- The age groups of 1-4 years and 15-24 years had the highest rates of drowning of 6.9 and 5.9 per 100,000 respectively.
- Accidental immersions were the most common activity prior to drowning (37%) followed by swimming (18%) and motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) (14%).
- Infants most commonly drown in the bathtub (67%). The 1-4 year age group predominantly drown in home pools (42%). The number of toddler deaths in home pools has reduced coinciding with legislation requiring fencing of domestic pools.
- The number of drownings in fenced pools with non-compliant gates or doors has remained reasonably static.
- Those aged 15-19 years drowned predominantly in MVAs and in natural bodies of water. Twenty eight percent of deaths in this age group involved alcohol.

The report [Circumstances surrounding drowning in those under 25 in New Zealand \(1980-2002\)](#) is available on the WSNZ website www.watersafety.org.nz/news/.

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Professor Barry Taylor will be available for interviews from 3.00 pm.

For more information or interview contact

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