

# **DON'T** duck out. Make it **SAFE.**

## A guide for portable pool buyers



australian consumer law



ROYAL LIFE SAVING  
AUSTRALIA

Buying a portable pool may not seem like a big decision and often they don't cost much. But portable pools are a drowning hazard for young children and come with responsibilities for parents and carers that you shouldn't duck out of. This fact sheet explains the things you need to consider before, and after, you buy a portable pool, in order to make it safe.

### What is a portable pool?

A portable pool can be for paddling, wading or swimming and sits above ground. You might call it another name such as "inflatable pool", "kiddie pool" or "splash pool". Portable pools might be filled with air (blow-up) or they can be made from flexible plastic or canvas that is attached to a frame. Portable pools vary in depth, from less than 15cm (the size of a small ruler) to more than one metre high.

### Why are portable pools dangerous?

Many adults do not realise that young children can drown in a small amount of water and that it only takes a few seconds. For this reason adults may NOT keep constant watch when toddlers are playing in or around small portable pools AND they may not empty the pool after each use.

Some Australians are not aware that in most states and territories you need to fence pools containing water deeper than 30cm (the size of a regular ruler) and don't buy a safety barrier when they purchase a portable pool. Breaking the law by not having a compliant safety barrier leaves you open to being fined or prosecuted by the relevant authority. What would be worse than any legal action or financial penalty would be the loss of a child through lack of pool fencing.

In recent years, large portable pools and inflatable spas have become cheaper and more readily available and may even come with a filter, resulting in them being left filled up for extended amounts of time. Fencing may seem expensive but failing to put up a safety barrier is illegal and puts children at risk of drowning.



**In Australia,  
on average one  
child dies every year  
from drowning in a  
portable pool.**

### Who is most at risk?

Statistics from Royal Life Saving Society - Australia show that children under five-years-old are the most likely age group to drown in a portable pool. Young kids are usually fascinated by water, unaware of the danger and can be very quick to toddle off on an adventure, or look for things to climb. Under-fives also tend to topple over more easily, for example when sitting in water, leaning over to look at water or reaching for an object. They can also be prone to escaping supervision because they need to be watched constantly and a parent or carer might become momentarily distracted.

## Mythbusting

What we think will happen when a child drowns, versus what actually happens, are two different things.

MYTH	REALITY
<b>You can hear drowning.</b>	In the movies a child will splash, splutter or cry out for help when drowning but in reality children drown quickly and quietly.
<b>Children only drown in deep water.</b>	Many adults believe water needs to be deep for a child to drown but the truth is kids can drown in as little as three centimetres of water. Enough water to cover a child's nose and mouth is all that is needed for a child to drown.
<b>Drowning takes minutes.</b>	Parents and carers may think they have time to answer the phone, check on cooking or go to the toilet quickly and that drowning will not happen in such a short amount of time. But the drowning process can start in seconds!

## Case study

You might be wondering how much of an issue portable pools are when it comes to children drowning in Australia. There are many true stories about portable pool deaths. In fact, in Australia, on average there is one portable pool related fatality a year. In addition to that, estimates indicate that for every fatal child drowning in a portable pool, there are a further eight children hospitalised due to a non-fatal drowning in a portable pool. Some of those hospitalised may be left with neurological injuries, which means they require ongoing care and are at risk of premature death.

- In 2015 a toddler was left with brain damage after a drowning incident in an unfenced portable pool at his grandparents' home in Perth. Eli passed away two years later.

Read his mum Phillipa's full story at [www.productsafety.gov.au/makeitsafe](http://www.productsafety.gov.au/makeitsafe)

## Tips for portable pool buyers

### At the shops

- Check the depth of the pool. If it's more than 30cm speak with your local council or government agency about safety barrier requirements - in most states and territories you'll need to buy fencing.
- Look for the warning label and read it carefully. If you spot a portable pool without a warning label, report that to your local consumer affairs agency. Find their contact details at [www.consumerlaw.gov.au](http://www.consumerlaw.gov.au)



Under the Australian Consumer Law, portable pools and their packaging are required to have labels drawing attention to drowning hazards and local fencing laws. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and State and Territory consumer protection or fair trading regulators enforce product safety labelling laws by carrying out inspections of portable pools at retailers.

## At home

**Before you set up and fill your portable pool, go through the [Make it SAFE](#) checklist.**

**Supervise.** Once the pool has water in, you'll need to actively watch any child, within arm's reach at all times, so you can prevent anything from going wrong. It's too much responsibility to leave older children in charge of younger kids and they may not recognise the signs of a drowning.

**Act.** Learn what to do in the event of a child drowning incident. You'll need to know how to carry out CPR and it's important to start compressions and breaths right away when a child is pulled from the water, and to call Triple Zero (000) so help is on the way. If possible shout for someone to call Triple Zero (000) while you continue CPR.

**Fence.** In most parts of Australia, if a pool has more than 30cm of water in it, there's a legal requirement for it to be fenced. You need to check with your local council or government agency for safety barrier rules.

**Empty** and store away portable pools. Pour out the water, deflate the portable pool and keep it safely out of reach of children when not in use. Never leave an empty pool in a place where it can refill with rain or sprinkler water.

**Know your responsibilities and don't duck out of doing any of these things.**

**DON'T duck out. Make it SAFE.**

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