



FACT SHEET:

Drowning and Safer Pool Fencing

Drowning:

Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death for young Canadians.

Drowning is the second leading cause of injury-related death to Canadian children ages 1 to 4.¹

An estimated 58 children age 14 and under drown each year in Canada, while another 140 are hospitalized for near-drowning.² This is equal to about two elementary school classrooms of children dying *every year*.

Annual cost for drowning for all ages in Canada has been estimated at over 250 million dollars.³

Pool Drowning:

Since swimming pools are involved in nearly half of all drowning and near-drowning incidents for children under 14 years,⁴ measures must be taken to reduce drowning in these environments.

Both in ground and above ground pools are a potential hazard.⁵

Many drowning deaths happen in private homes with unfenced or inadequately fenced swimming pools and spas.⁶ In most drowning cases the pools (95%) have inadequate safety gates.⁷

Pools are a particular hazard for children under 5 years old because they are attracted to water but lack a clear sense of danger.⁸

Drowning of young children often occurs when the child is walking or playing near water, not when they are swimming or intending to go in the water. Most happen when the child gets near water during a momentary lapse in adult supervision.⁹

Prevention:

Researchers estimate that proper fencing could prevent 7 out of 10 drowning incidents in home swimming pools for children under age 5.¹⁰

Safer pool fencing should be *at minimum* 1.2 m (4 ft) high, four-sided and with self-closing, self-latching gates¹¹. The fence should be constructed in a way that makes it difficult for young children to climb.



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A four-sided fence completely separates the pool from the home. This passive measure helps to keep children away from the pool and prevent unintentional drowning.

In most places in Canada, safer pool fencing is not yet required. Municipal residential pool fencing laws, where they exist, often require only three-sided perimeter fencing. Three-sided fencing does not protect the children who live in the house as they may gain access to the pool directly from the house.

Safer pool fencing laws put in place in other jurisdictions have helped to prevent drowning.¹²

If Canada had mandated four-sided pool fencing with self closing self latching gates for home pools similar to New Zealand and Australia, as many as 292 drowning and near-drowning incidents of children under the age of 5 could have been prevented during the 10 year period 1994-2003.¹³

Call to Action:

Pool fencing laws should require *at minimum* 1.2 m (4ft) high, four-sided fence with self-closing, self-latching gates. All municipalities should enact and enforce four-sided fencing by-laws for homes with pools.

The rate and number of young children (1 to 4 years) who drowned in backyard pools varies across Canadian regions with higher incidence in Ontario and Quebec. This may be related to exposure to home pools.

Local by-laws can be supported by education and by minimum standards of provincial/territorial legislation.

Provincially, Manitoba has incorporated mandatory pool fencing in the Manitoba Building Code. However, the pool enclosure requirement in the Building Code does not currently specify four-sided pool fencing. In Quebec, the province recently passed provincial-wide pool safety legislation (Bill 18) and is currently working to develop regulations for minimum pool fencing and pool safety standards.

For more background information on drowning prevention and safer pool fencing please contact Government Relations and Policy Staff, at 1-888-SAFE-TIPS (723-3847) or email us at safekids.web@sickkids.ca. You can also visit us online at www.safekidscanada.ca



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References:

- ¹ Safe Kids Canada. Child & Youth Unintentional Injury: 1994–2003 10 Years in Review. 2006. p. 12
- ² Safe Kids Canada. Child & Youth Unintentional Injury: 1994–2003 10 Years in Review. 2006. p. 12
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http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/other_injury/en/drowning_factsheet.pdf
- Cost are for all ages. Updated to 2007 dollars via bank of Canada inflation index
http://www.bankofcanada.ca/en/rates/inflation_calc.html.
- ⁴ Safe Kids Canada. Child & Youth Unintentional Injury: 1994–2003 10 Years in Review. 2006. p. 12
- ⁵ Canadian Red Cross. Drownings and Other Water-Related Injuries in Canada, 1991–2000.
- ⁶ The New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs. Guidelines for Territorial Authorities on The Fencing of Swimming Pools Act 1987, 3.
- ⁷ Canadian Red Cross. Drownings and Other Water-Related Injuries in Canada, 1991–2000. Module 1: Overview. P. 21
- ⁸ Safe Kids Canada. Child & Youth Unintentional Injury: 1994–2003 10 Years in Review. 2006. p. 12
- ⁹ Canadian Red Cross. Drownings and Other Water-Related Injuries in Canada, 1991–2000. Module 1: Overview. P. 32
- ¹⁰ Thompson D, Rivera F. “Pool Fencing for Preventing Drowning in Children.” Cochrane Review. The Cochrane Library 3, 2004.
- ¹¹ Stevenson M, Rimajova M, Edgecombe D, Vickery K. Childhood drowning: barriers surrounding private swimming pools. *Pediatrics* 2003; 111(2):e115–e119.
- ¹² New Zealand: www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/council/services/fencing/compliance.asp#standards
Australia : www.poolfencing.qld.gov.au/?id=72
and France : www.securiteconso.org/article293.html
- ¹³ Calculation based on data from Safe Kids Canada. Child & Youth Unintentional Injury: 1994–2003 10 Years in Review. 2006 and Canadian Red Cross Drownings and Other Water-Related Injuries in Canada, 1991–2000 1991–2000 data.