

Australian Medical Association Limited

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KEEP COOL (AND SAFE) WHEN IN THE WATER THESE HOLIDAYS

The AMA is urging everybody – whether locals or tourists, young or old - to be especially aware of the dangers of beaches, rivers, creeks, and other swimming spots during the summer season.

Last summer saw an increase in drowning deaths, with 110 lives lost.

Across the country, Surf Lifesaving Australia performed 10,249 rescues. They also performed 65,296 first-aid treatments.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the staggering drowning and lifesaving statistics show that Australians and visitors to our country are not heeding the lifesaving warnings.

“Tragically, every summer Australia experiences an increased number of drowning deaths,” Dr Bartone said.

“Our beautiful beaches, rivers, and waterways are much busier, with families on school holidays - and long, hot days make water activity more enticing.

“Every year, we repeat the same message: do not drink alcohol or take drugs if you are near water.

“The AMA also has a message for visitors, tourists and people travelling to new locations: pay attention to warnings, do not venture into unknown rivers or waterways, and always swim on beaches with lifesaving services nearby.

“People born overseas account for about one third of drowning deaths every year.”

To maximise water safety, the AMA recommends:

- Do not swim alone unless you are under the supervision of experienced lifesavers.
- Always swim between the flags, and check warning signs for dangerous conditions such as rips.
- Never ever swim or enter water while intoxicated or under the influence of illegal drugs, and use extreme caution if taking prescription medication.
- Never enter beaches, waterways, rivers, or creeks unless you know the depth, currents, and tides. One in 10 of all new spinal injuries occurs in the water.
- If you have children, never leave them unsupervised. And remember that flotation devices can make children appear more competent in the water than they are.
- If your child is given pool or water toys for Christmas, make sure that you familiarise yourself with the safety instructions, and read the instructions to make sure that toys are appropriate for the age and weight of the child.
- Leaving toys in the pool can tempt children into the water. Deflate and pack away toys when they are not in use to remove this temptation.

The AMA warns anyone undertaking rock fishing or partaking in activities like kayaking, windsurfing, or jet skiing to only do so if you are competent, and have experienced people with you.

Background

The most recent data from the National Coastal Safety Report 2018 showed:

- 110 coastal and ocean drowning deaths.
- 80 per cent of drowning deaths were men, 20 per cent were women.
- 32 per cent of drowning deaths were attributed to swimming.
- 25 per cent of drowning deaths were attributed to boating.
- 9 per cent of drowning deaths involved people rock fishing.

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