



EMBARGOED UNTIL 10.30 AM (QLD TIME) FRIDAY DECEMBER 12

**SURGE IN DROWNING DEATHS PUTS QUEENSLAND ON TRACK FOR WORST YEAR EVER FOR
DROWNING**

QUEENSLAND is on track for its worst ever year for drowning after seven drowning deaths in the past three weeks, spread from Far North Queensland to the NSW border, the Royal Life Saving Society announced today.

The Royal Life Saving Society Queensland compiles the official drowning statistics for the State each year. Executive Director Michael Darben said he had never seen such a horror start to the summer swimming season across all age groups.

“Watching the stories coming out day after day of people losing their lives completely unnecessarily is enormously frustrating for those of us who work in drowning prevention, because almost all drowning deaths are utterly preventable,” Mr Darben said.

“If this trend continues, more than double the number of people who drowned in 2007/2008 will die in Queensland this financial year.

“This is not a problem that affects only one region of Queensland, or only young people. The seven people who’ve lost their lives ranged in age from 18 months to an elderly woman. They drowned everywhere from backyard pools to rivers and flooded causeways, in geographically diverse areas from the Severn River near the border to just south of Cairns.

“No one ever thinks a drowning tragedy is going to affect them. But with seven lives lost in three weeks, and countless friends and extended family left behind, the grief from drowning deaths is touching more and more people in Queensland. All of these victims were much loved and are terribly missed.

“Every person in Queensland needs to wake up to the key risks and start being more alert.”

Key risks for toddlers

“In toddlers, the key risk area is the backyard – whether it is the pool area for city kids, or dams for kids growing up on properties,” Mr Darben said.

“I was reading the interview with Holly Roberts’ parents who made the very brave decision to speak out about the circumstances of her death. And what they said was exactly right. You need to remove toys that would tempt a small child into the pool; shift anything that a child could use to climb on away from the pool area. Supervision is vital; children drown silently in less than a minute. No parent can watch their child every second of the day, which is why the pool fence is so important.

“Everyone with a backyard pool needs to take responsibility for getting out and checking the fence. Remind the kids not to prop open the gate. Check the latch works. Pull on the panels or bars and make sure they don’t come loose. Download the free checklist developed by Royal Life Saving and our partners PoolWerx from www.homepoolsafety.com.au and follow through all of the steps.

“If you’re on a farm, develop a safe space near the house where kids can play away from water. Fence it off if necessary. Farms are full of drowning hazards for children, especially because toddlers can drown in as little as the depth of water produced by some melting ice in the bottom of an esky.”

Key risks for adults

“What we see with adults is people taking unnecessary risks and just not thinking hard enough about their surroundings. Cars can be washed away in as little as 30cm of water so you simply can’t afford to try crossing a river or causeway that is flooded,” Mr Darben said.

“People visiting rivers and pools are at particular risk because those bodies of water look safe. But it’s what you can’t see that puts you at risk. You can’t see the river’s current; you don’t know how deep the water is; you don’t know whether there are tree branches or rocks hidden below you.

“Never swim alone.”

Prevention

“To protect your loved ones, before you go near any kind of waterway go to www.royallifesaving.com.au and download the relevant free factsheet, which cover everything from bath time safety to boating safety and inland waterways,” Mr Darben said.

“Get enrolled in a CPR course now so if the worst does happen, you’re not left waiting for the ambulance to arrive, wasting precious minutes which could make all the difference between life and death. Courses aren’t expensive and we run them very regularly in Queensland.

“Take the time to assess new environments. If you’re visiting friends who have a pool with the kids over summer make sure an adult is watching them at all times.

“And with Christmas around the corner, make sure if you’re having a beer you don’t pull on your boardies.

“What I hope is that this time next year I’ll be standing here telling you, that with the media’s help, Queenslanders took this message to heart and the overall number of drowning deaths dropped.”

For advice or assistance, call us on 1300 737 763 or (07) 3823 2823.

The seven deaths Royal Life Saving Society Queensland are referring to are:

- 3-year-old Holly Roberts who drowned in a backyard pool on Sunday 7 December.
- An 18-month-old boy who drowned in a dam on a property at Kingaroy on Wednesday 3 December.
- An 8-year-old boy who drowned in Tinana, near Maryborough on Sunday 30 November, after being hit by a passing boat.
- Sub-Lieutenant James Bennett, 23, who drowned at Devil's Pool, near Babinda on Sunday 30 November.
- A man in his 40s drowned at Ballandean after being swept away in the Severn River at Sundown National Park on Saturday November 29.
- 4-year-old Nelani Koefer who drowned in Bedford Weir near Blackwater on Sunday November 23.
- An elderly woman who drowned at Forest Hill after the car she was travelling in was swept away by floodwaters on November 20.

For more information contact:

Michael Darben
Executive Director, Royal Life Saving Society Queensland
0416 045 772

Or

Belinda Lawton
National Media & Communications, Royal Life Saving Society Australia
0409 305 000

Background:

Royal Life Saving Society Australia has been serving Australia for over 110 years and is the leading water safety, swimming and lifesaving education organisation in Australia. Royal Life Saving is dedicated to turning everyday people into everyday community lifesavers. We achieve this through: education; training; health promotion; aquatic risk management; community development; sport and participation; advocacy; research; and international networks. Royal Life Saving has branches in every State and Territory in Australia.

For more information about Royal Life Saving, visit our website at www.royallifesaving.com.au