

WAW FAQ's - Staff

How long has Watch Around Water been around for?

Watch Around Water (WAW) was developed in Western Australia by the Leisure Institute of Western Australia (LIWA) and Royal Life Saving Society WA (RLSSWA) and has been running for 9 years. In Victoria, the program is managed by Life Saving Victoria (LSV) and has been running for 6 years.

Why was WAW developed?

Drowning and water related injuries represent a real problem for the aquatics industry - especially those involving young children. The program has been developed for the industry by the industry. The aquatics industry has long recognised the value of a program that improves facility safety through encouraging parents to adopt greater responsibility for the supervision of their children and educating parents about appropriate supervision.

What is the supervision requirements for children under 5 years?

The under 5 years supervision requirement of 'within arm's reach' has been based on a number of factors. Children under 5 years are most at risk of fatal and non-fatal drowning, with drowning the number one accidental cause of death of children in this age group. This is also in line with research and best practice that has been used for over 15 years in other supervision messaging. Children under 5 years lack the physical and mental capabilities to discern danger and get themselves out of trouble when in the water and therefore require close supervision. The Coroner has highlighted the importance of close supervision in children in this age group, as supervision is the main contributor to children under 5 years drowning.

What is the supervision requirements for children under 10 years?

The current industry provisions for supervision standards are from the Royal Life Saving Society's Guidelines for Safe Pool Operation (GSPO) which state supervision requirements such as children under 10 years will not be admitted without an appropriate guardian 16 years or older and children under 10 years should be actively supervised by a parent / guardian at all times. The Watch Around Water policies sit in line with this as it is currently accepted across the industry.

Why is my facility implementing this program now?

Even though your facility may have not had any fatal or non-fatal drowning deaths in the past, it is important that adequate levels of supervision are practiced to demonstrate duty of care and due diligence. The consequences of a fatal drowning death are significant and it is widely accepted that prevention is better than cure.



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What does 'within arm's reach' mean?

This term has been used for many years in relation to toddler supervision when in or around water. While this does not literally mean that a parent / guardian must be an arm's length away from a young child at all times, it refers to them being able to respond and react immediately should something happen to the child. This still allows children to swim and play but ensures that parents are actively supervising and able to intervene if the young child gets into trouble. Remember, it only takes 20 seconds for a child to drown.

What do I do if I see a child under 5 years playing in the water without a parent or guardian present?

If you can see the parent / guardian nearby, although not in the water, approach them and explain the program policies. If they or another guardian are not willing to enter the water, remove the child from the water, explaining that the program requires this level of supervision to ensure the safety of the child.

If I do remove a young child from the water that is not being appropriately supervised, and a parent confronts me, how should I react?

Calmly explain the facility guidelines for children under 5 years / under 10 years.

Why is it important for me to worry about supervision issues if I am not a lifeguard?

It is important to remember that Watch Around Water is unlikely to work if it is just left to the pool lifeguards. A contribution from all staff will ensure that the program is adequately accepted throughout the facility. Every staff member must ensure that the program policies are being met by parents / guardians. Speak to your centre manager about what role you will play in Watch Around Water.

Do the guidelines apply for children in swimming lessons?

Individual facilities should determine and document their parental supervision expectations for when young children are taking part in swimming lessons. This internal policy should be clearly advised to staff, parents / guardians and subsequently enforced. There should be a particular focus on the handover process before and after lessons.