



Media Release

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KIDSAFE URGES FAMILIES TO CHECK POOL BARRIERS AND HELP SAVE A LIFE

Kidsafe Australia has joined forces with Olympic champion Matt Welsh to launch its annual 'Safe Barriers Save Lives' campaign, calling on home pool and spa owners to 'help save a life' by checking their barriers before the warmer months.

The call comes as figures from the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia's (RLSSA) National Drowning Report show that **17 Australian toddlers drowned in 2021/22. Swimming pools were the leading location where these incidents occurred, accounting for 35% of all toddler drowning deaths.**

While toddler drowning rates reduced by 29% compared to 2020/21, drowning continues to be one of the leading causes of accidental death for Australian children under five.

As an Olympic swimming champion, Matt Welsh knows the benefits that learning to swim and growing up around water can provide for children. As a father of six, he also acknowledges the risks that swimming pools and spas can pose if strategies aren't put in place to help keep children safe.

"Toddlers are attracted to water, however they don't yet understand the dangers that it can pose. Toddler drownings happen quickly and silently - a split second is all it takes for them to gain unsupervised access to the water area and find themselves in trouble."

Josie Costanzo knows just how quickly this can happen - her three-year-old son Justin drowned in a neighbour's pool in 2000 after the gate had been propped open with a rock.

"Justin died in 21 seconds with one mouthful of water, 125ml to be precise, in his lungs. I still had his dinner plate in my hand when I heard a call from my daughter and looked out the window to see him in the pool. That's how quickly it can happen. I was numb," said Ms Costanzo.

While pool and spa barriers can be effective in reducing the risk of drowning incidents, evidence suggests that a large number of drowning deaths involve barriers that are faulty, have not been maintained, or are non-compliant with Australian standards.

Mr Welsh said barrier checks are an important part of a regular routine for all pool and spa owners.

"With the summer months just around the corner and families spending more time in and around water, it's important to be prepared. By checking that your pool barriers and gates are in good working order, you could save a life."

In addition to regularly checking and maintaining pool barriers, Kidsafe Australia's campaign highlights other actions which are vital to help keep children safe in and around water, including:

- **Active adult supervision:** having an adult within arm's reach of toddlers at all times when in or around water.
- **Water awareness:** participating in water awareness and learn to swim classes helps children to become familiar with water, learn about water safety and learn how to swim.

- **CPR/First Aid:** Kidsafe encourages all parents and carers to enrol in a CPR/First Aid course and regularly update their skills. Doing so will equip them with the tools to respond in an emergency.

Top 5 issues with pool and spa barriers

- Gates or doors that are no longer self-closing
- Gates or doors that are no longer self-latching
- Gates that are propped open for convenience – allowing children unsupervised access
- Gaps, holes or spaces in and under the barrier which a child can get through
- Climbable objects near the pool barrier e.g. BBQ's, outdoor furniture, eskies, trees etc.

For more information, please visit [Kidsafe Australia's pool and spa safety website](#).

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