



RLSS UK
EXPERT
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SERIES

CHILD DROWNING UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2024: England





Enjoy Water **Safely**

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Introduction

In July 2023, the National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) published its thematic report *Deaths of children and young people due to traumatic incidents*, which highlighted evidence of an increase in the number of child drowning deaths in England, from 20 in 2019-20 to 37 in 2021-22.

The report, which was co-authored by the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK), also highlighted disparities in those most at risk from child drowning, which included children from more deprived backgrounds and some minority ethnic groups.

In July 2024, the NCMD published an interim drowning summary report, which documents all child drowning deaths notified between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

At RLSS UK, we believe that no child should drown. We also believe that it is vitally important to maximise every opportunity to understand as much as possible about the circumstances and factors contributing to child drowning deaths, to help raise awareness and grow understanding with the aim of reducing the number of young lives lost. In this update, RLSS UK explores an up-to-date overview of child drowning deaths, covering the latest data available from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2023.

Headline Findings:

The number of **child drowning deaths** has doubled.

There were **125 child drowning deaths** in England across the last four years.

2x

Twice as many male children drowned as female children.

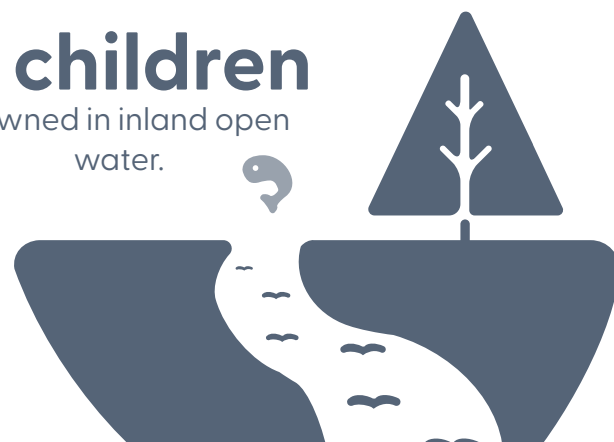
2 in 5

children that drowned were aged under 5 years.

On average, at least
1 child
a month
drowned at home.

86% of child drownings occurred when the child was unsupervised by an adult.

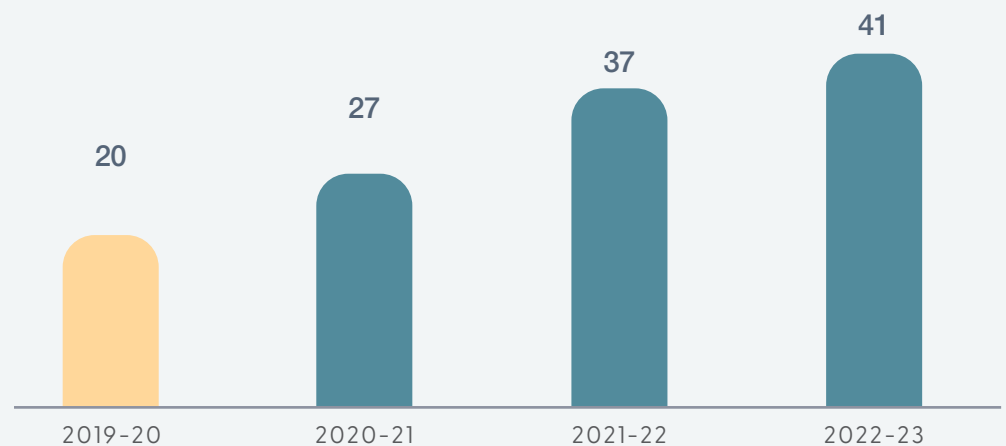
51 children
drowned in inland open water.



01

Child drowning deaths in England
have doubled in the last 4 years.

Figure 1: Number of child drowning deaths in England, 1 April 2019–31 March 2023



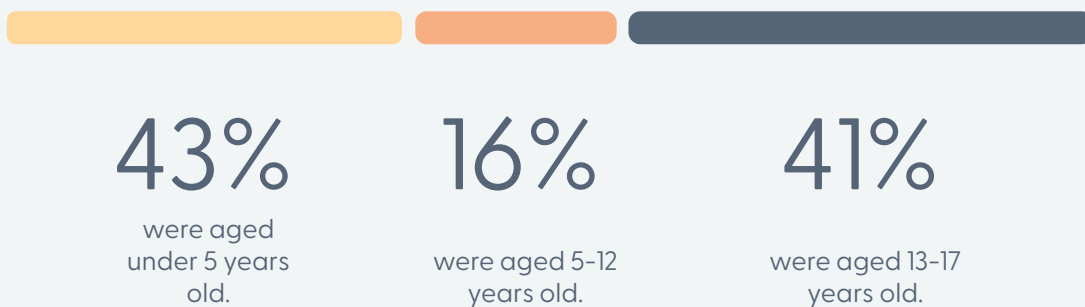
Base: All child drowning deaths in England, 1 April 2019–31 March 2023

In total, there were 125 child drowning deaths in England
between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2023.

71% of these were male children.



Of those that drowned...



Supervision

A lack of supervision remains a contributory factor across all accidental child drownings, and where recorded, 86% occurred when the child was unsupervised by an adult.

This lack of supervision varied across the reported cases. For example, in the case of bath drownings, there were cases where the parent/carer had left the bathroom only momentarily, to those where the child had been left unattended in the bath for a prolonged period. It also included cases where the child had been left in the bath with siblings.

RLSS UK hopes to highlight to parents and carers, that drowning happens quickly and often silently.

Always keep young children within arm's reach in water. Always supervise all children in and around water. This will help ensure that all children can **enjoy water safely**.



DID YOU KNOW? Drowning can happen in as little as 2 cm of water.
Always keep young children within arm's reach.

02

Drownings at home

Across the four-year period, 51 children drowned in the home. Younger children are most at risk¹ and sadly, these statistics show that **one child a month drowns at home in England**.

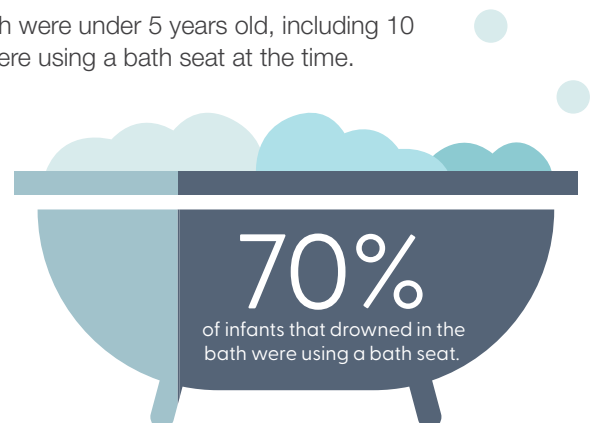


2 in 3 children that drowned at home, did so in the bath.
This totalled 35 deaths in four years.

25 out of the 35 children that drowned in the bath were under 5 years old, including 10 infants less than one year old. Of these, seven were using a bath seat at the time.

Whilst bath seats can be a useful tool in assisting parents at bath-time, they are not a safety device. **Never leave a child unattended in a bath seat, even if they are with a sibling.**

¹National Drowning Report (RLSS UK), June 2023



RLSS UK TOP TIPS for enjoying water safely at bath time

GET PREPPED

Get towels, toiletries and bath toys ready to go before filling the bath.

KEEP CLOSE

Always keep your child within arm's reach. Remember, babies can be slippery when wet and soapy, meaning they can easily slip under the water.

STAY TOGETHER

If you need to leave the bathroom, take your child with you.

AVOID DISTRACTIONS

Leave your mobile phone outside the bathroom.

CHECK

That all the water has drained out of the bath after use. Toys can easily block the plughole, leaving water unexpectedly in the tub.

TIDY

Keep the plug and toys out of reach when not in use. Shut the bathroom door to limit children's access.





1 in 3 children that drowned at home did so in places such as paddling pools, hot tubs and ponds.

Across the four years, this totalled 16 drownings.

Whilst lots of fun can be had with water in the home and garden, easy access to water in familiar spaces can sometimes make it easy to forget the risks water can bring.

In 2022-23, three children drowned in hot tubs after they were left uncovered. This poses a stark reminder of the importance of replacing covers on hot tubs and similar products immediately after use.

Paddling pools offer great fun, but once you've finished playing, empty the water out straight-away to avoid accidents. We also advise overturning pools to stop them accidentally refilling if it rains - this includes other water containers, such as buckets, which can also fill up during a downpour, creating a risk to young children.

When not in use, turn off the hosepipe at the tap to restrict children re-filling vessels without an adult.

RLSS UK TOP TIPS for enjoying water safely in the garden

SECURELY COVER OR EMPTY ALL WATER VESSELS AFTER USE

- Including paddling pools, hot tubs, water play tables and storage containers

STOP WATER VESSELS FROM RE-FILLING BY:

- Turning them over
- Turning off the hosepipe off at the tap, so children cannot fill vessels themselves

STOP CHILDREN GAINING ACCESS TO PONDS AND POOLS BY:

- Installing secure fencing at least 4 feet high
- Adding a strong mesh or grill to the top of your pond - one that is strong enough to take the weight of a child
- Keeping your door locked to restrict access to outdoor areas that can pose risks
- Consider filling-in your pond until your child is older



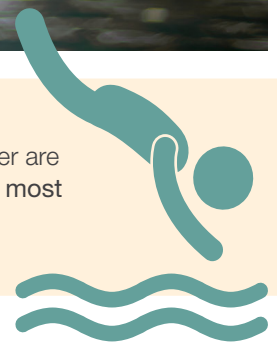
03

Drownings in inland open water



51 children have drowned in inland open water, such as rivers, lakes and canals in the last four years. This includes 20 children in 2022-23 when the UK recorded some record high air temperatures.²

Data in the National Drowning Report showed children aged 5 and over are more likely to drown in inland water, with those aged 13-17 years old most likely to be actively entering the water to swim.³



² Met Office, Seasonal Assessment Summer 2022. ³ National Drowning Report, RLSS UK, June 2023.

Under the current English PE Curriculum, children should be taught swimming and water safety in primary school and outcomes are assessed at the end of Key Stage 2. According to Sport England Active Lives, in 2022-23 the number of children in Year 7 reported to be able to swim 25m was significantly lower than in 2017-18. The data also suggests many schools are struggling to provide suitable swimming provision; 35.4% of primary schools offered fewer than 10 swimming lessons per pupil across the academic year 2022-23.

RLSS UK TOP TIPS for staying safe in inland water

LEARN THE WATER SAFETY CODE

- With statutory swimming outcomes in decline, RLSS UK encourages all parents to talk to their child about water safety
- Ensure that your family are familiar with the [Water Safety Code](#)

LOOK FOR A LIFEGUARD

- Always use lifeguarded venues where possible

TAKE CARE NEAR THE EDGE

- When walking or running next to open water, stay well clear of bank edges

We urge all schools to consider signing up to our [Water Smart Schools](#) accreditation programme, that provides all the necessary materials to deliver class-based water safety education, utilising our tried and tested, adaptable lesson plans and resources. Its holistic approach allows whole school involvement, fostering greater understanding of water safety issues, both locally and further afield.



Drownings in other locations

There were 23 drownings in 'other' locations across the four-year period. This included those in swimming pools, abroad and the in UK, as well as those on the coast. To avoid disclosure, no further analysis on these drownings is available at this time.

RLSS UK encourages everyone to visit a lifeguarded pool or beach wherever possible. If travelling abroad, ask your accommodation provider if they offer a lifeguard service.

References:

National Child Mortality Database (NCMD), Deaths of children and young people due to traumatic incidents, July 2023
 National Child Mortality Database (NCMD), Drowning Summary Report, July 2024
 Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) National Drowning Report UK, June 2023
 Sport England Active Lives, 2021-2023

Supplementary Tables

Table 1: Number (n=) of child drowning deaths by age, gender and location by year

	ALL YEARS	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
ALL DEATHS	125	20	27	37	41
AGE AT DEATH (YEARS)					
<5 YEARS	54	8	14	16	16
5-12 YEARS	20	4	3	3	10
13-17 YEARS	51	8	10	18	15
SEX					
FEMALE	36	9	6	7	14
MALE	89	11	21	30	27
LOCATION					
INLAND (LAKE, RIVER, CANAL PUBLIC POND)	51	5	8	18	20
RESIDENTIAL BATH	35	4	9	12	10

About RLSS UK

Enjoy Water **Safely**



RLSS UK is passionate about ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to enjoy water safely. And there's perhaps no more popular time to make use of our extensive coastline and waterways than when the sun is shining, and the weather is hot. Whilst having fun in, on or near water in hot weather, it is even more important that everyone ensures they know how to stay safe and how to respond in an emergency.

Remember the **Water Safety Code** and for more water safety advice, visit our website www.rlss.org.uk

For more information on drowning statistics, view the **National Drowning Report UK**.



Authored by the
Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK), with thanks to
the National Child Mortality Database (NCMD).

RLSS UK is a registered charity which provides expert
lifesaving education in the UK and Ireland, protecting families
from the sudden and devastating impact of drowning.

www.rlss.org.uk

