

KEEP POOLS FUN FOR YOUR FAMILY WITH A SAFE POOL BARRIER

Matt Welsh OAM, Australian Olympic Swimming Champion and Kidsafe Ambassador, shares his advice for families



It's safe to say that most – if not all – of us are looking forward to the summer months and being able to get back to more regular social gatherings with family and friends. Fingers crossed there will be more time spent enjoying a pool party, BBQs together, picnics, or even holidays away.

The last 18 months or so has been tough on so many of us, in lots of different ways. Children have been finding their way through homeschooling, cooped up indoors more, away from their friends **and** missing their regular sporting and social activities.

Backyard Swimming Pools are part of Australian culture

As an Olympic swimmer, I love the water. Swimming means so much more to me than just a sport and a way to keep fit – it's been my life and has led to so many other opportunities outside of the pool.

I believe that pools and spas are a great way to have fun in your own backyard and are a welcome addition to any home – especially to help cool off on those hot summer days.

When the warmer weather arrives (and decides to stick around, which is always a gamble in Victoria), chances are kids will be more excited than ever to jump right back into the pool to have some fun. It's also highly likely that many families will be spending more time at home around their backyards.

To help ensure that we can all have a fun and safe summer, it's important to be aware of the potential dangers that the water can pose – *particularly* for young children.

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Drowning is still one of the leading causes of unintentional death for children aged under 5 in Australia, with swimming pools one of the most common locations where these incidents occur.

For toddlers, like my youngest child Alby, keeping him within arm's reach is the only way to ensure that he is actively supervised around water. With many aquatic facilities closed and children unable to regularly learn about water safety and take swimming lessons in the last 18 months, it's as important as ever for everyone to be vigilant.

Teaching your children about water safety from a young age, starting in the bathtub and then moving on to swimming lessons, is also vital to introduce and nurture their familiarisation with water.

Another key ingredient to keeping your kids safe is undertaking a first aid / CPR course – and making sure to keep your training up to date every year. Hopefully these are skills that you will never have to use, but they will help to ensure that you are able to respond in an emergency.

Is your backyard pool or spa ready to be used safely?

As we roll into summer we need to ask ourselves - are our backyard pools and spas ready to be used safely?

It's not only the water quality that's important to check, but also the condition of our pool and spa barriers which are exposed to general wear and tear and the elements all year round.

Like many items around the home such as your car and even your heater, regular checks and maintenance is necessary to ensure that your pool or spa barrier is still in proper working order.

A large number of swimming pool drowning incidents are as a result of faulty or non-compliant pool barriers which allow children unsupervised access to the water area.

Take 15 minutes to save a child's life

When was the last time that you checked your pool barrier or what was lying around nearby? It might sound like a difficult task, however there are some simple checks you can regularly do yourself and some handy resources to help guide you.

There are 5 safety aspects which are important to regularly check and maintain:

Top 5 Safety Checks for Pool and Spa Barriers



1 Gate is self-closing



2 Gate is self-latching



3 Gate never propped open



4 No gaps / holes / spaces
(a child can get through)



5 No climbable objects nearby
- furniture, eskies, trees, etc

In [this video](#), I step you through these checks to help ensure that your pool or spa barrier is in proper working order.

If you are looking to perform some more detailed checks, the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia has a range of handy [pool and spa barrier checklists](#) that you can use.

Don't delay - please take 15 minutes to check if your pool and spa is safe – that's not long when it could save a child's life.

Remember, when it comes to backyard pool safety – safe barriers save lives.

For more information about water safety, please visit <https://kidsafe.com.au/safe-barriers-save-lives/>