



Water Safety NZ and Plunket bath mat project

Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) and Plunket are launching an exciting new water safety initiative aimed at creating better water safety awareness and ultimately reducing the drowning rate of young children in New Zealand. A contract has been signed between the two organizations and work has progressed to the point where the project is ready to roll out. Mats have been delivered to Plunket Areas throughout New Zealand and the project is about to be launched.

This water safety project will....

Create greater awareness and educate parents and caregivers on the importance of water safety for young children, and ultimately reducing the drowning rate in children under five years of age. Plunket staff who were introduced to the project at the 2009 Rotorua conference were enthusiastic about the initiative.

What the statistics tell us....

Drowning of children under five years of age in New Zealand continues to be high. In the last 10 years (2000-2009), 90 under 5s have drowned¹. 58% of those under 5s drowned while at home, the majority being in a home pool or bath.

Research undertaken in 2005 into circumstances surrounding drowning in those under 25 in New Zealand (1980-2002)² (the research) concluded the following *"Drowning, although reducing in incidence is still a leading cause of death amongst NZ children and youth. Given the enormous social and economic cost of drowning and the preventable nature of those deaths, it is a problem worthy of our attention. Policy is in place to reduce toddler death in home pools, but attention needs to be given to enforcing compliance with legislation and further research would be useful to evaluate the effectiveness of this. Parents need to be educated by doctors, allied health professionals and media about the importance of supervision of infants and young children while they are near any body of water, especially in the bathtub or swimming pools."* The research went onto make the following key points:

- All children under the age of three years should be constantly supervised in the bath by an adult
- Children under the age of five years should not be left to supervise younger children in the bath
- All home pools need to be fenced in regulation with the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act 1987, with attention to ongoing compliance. Gates should never be propped open
- Adults need to closely supervise toddlers while they are near any body of water.

¹ DrownBase™

² Circumstances Surrounding Drowning in Those Under 25 in New Zealand (1980-2002). *Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee, 2005.*

The project....

1. **Bath mat at 5 months**
2. **Sticker at 9 months**
3. **Poster promotion throughout project**

1. **Bath mat at 5 month Well Child check**

A non-slip bath/shower mat will be provided to each family at the 5 month core check with the Plunket Nurse. This mat will have the message “**Always supervise children around water....always**” “**Tiakina ngā tamariki ki te taha wai i ngā wā katoa**”. Staff will also be able to verbally reinforce the water safety messages as they hand the mat over, removing it from the packaging and discussing the message, emphasising the need to watch children around water and keep a hand on baby at bath time. The mats are being distributed to the Plunket areas in March 2010 and will be reordered by areas as stocks need replenishing.

Why provide the mat at the 5 month check?

- At 5 months babies are beginning to sit up and a bathmat is a safety precaution to reduce slipping while the baby is sitting in the bath, particularly as parents are more likely to leave the baby unsupervised as they get to this age and onwards. The research states in relation to bath drowning deaths, children were usually left momentarily for example to finish other household tasks or answer the phone.
- 88% of all under 5 domestic and home pool drownings were children aged 2 or under (2000-2009), with 48% occurring at age 1 (12-23 months). Educating as children are approaching this high risk age is vital.

2. **Sticker at 9 month check**

Following up on the bath/shower mat parents will be provided with a reminder sticker at the next core check (9 months of age) for placement in their child's Well Child Tamariki Ora book.

3. **Poster**

An educational poster will be provided to all Plunket clinics reinforcing the message/s on the bathmat.

The project is intended to run for a three year period with evaluation at the completion of each 12 month period.

Additional resources

Water Safety NZ has additional water safety resources relating to children under 5 available to order on their website www.watersafety.org.nz. Staff may wish to use these resources to provide clients with additional information.

For all Plunket queries relating to the bath mat project please contact:

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