

## **PAEDIATRIC SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND POSITION STATEMENT ON THE PROVISION OF SWIMMING POOL FENCING**

### **THE PAEDIATRIC SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND BELIEVES THAT:**

1. Drowning in swimming pools is an important and preventable cause of injury mortality and morbidity of New Zealand children. <sup>1 2 3</sup>
2. All appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures should be taken to protect children from injury, neglect or negligent treatment while they are in the care of parent (s), legal guardians (s), or any other person who has care of the child. <sup>4</sup>
3. Fencing which completely encloses a swimming pool (that is four sided fencing) and isolates it from the home has been shown to be the most effective method of preventing young children drowning in home pools. Pool fences should have dynamic and secure self latching gates or doors at any point of entry and these should effectively maintain the isolation of the pool from the house. <sup>5</sup>
4. Swimming pool alarm systems triggered by children entering an area or entering the water (and other alternative devices to fencing, such as pool covers) have not been demonstrated as adequate alternatives to fully enclosing fencing. *Note: There is no evidence that shows alarms or other measures can be as safe or as effective at preventing child drowning as a barrier fence.*

### **THE PAEDIATRIC SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND NOTES THAT;**

5. The Child & Youth Mortality Review Committee's Fifth Report to the Minister of Health (2009) notes that the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act (1987) has reduced child drowning in home swimming pools. During a seven year period prior to the introduction of the Act an average of 11.5 children under the age of five drowned per year in home swimming pools. Following implementation of the Act an average of 2 children under the age of five drowned per year (2002-2008), this was despite an estimated 30% increase in home swimming pools. <sup>6</sup>
6. The majority of infants and children who drowned in home swimming pools during the reviewed period (2002-2008) did so primarily because at the time the swimming pools were not compliant with the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act (1987). Non compliance occurs through the deterioration of pool fences, gates and gate-latches failing, misuse (gates propped open) or modifications. <sup>7</sup>
7. The Child & Youth Mortality Review Committee's Fifth Report to the Minister of Health (2009) noted that there is variable checking of swimming pool compliance, a lack of ongoing maintenance of pool fences and a lack of education for pool owners and users. <sup>8</sup>
8. In 2007 seventy-three Local Authorities were surveyed regarding enforcement of the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act. Of the forty-nine Local Authorities who responded, only thirty-one said they had a programme for re-inspecting swimming pool fences to ensure ongoing compliance. <sup>9</sup>
9. The World Report on Child Injury Prevention states that "Interventions that appear most effective are those encompassing a variety of strategies including legislation, environmental modification and education" (page 20).<sup>10</sup> The Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee and Water Safety New Zealand recommend public education on the circumstances where there is a heightened risk of child drowning. <sup>11</sup>

### **THE PAEDIATRIC SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND RECOMMENDS:**

10. New Zealand Government legislation requires the effective fencing of both newly constructed and existing swimming pools; and this legislation includes monitoring (a pool safety 'warrant of fitness') and education and enforcement provisions to maintain the highest level of safety for children.
11. Water safety education programmes for the public include the information that home swimming pools need an effective barrier (i.e. be compliant with the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act) at all times and that young children must always be closely supervised by an adult when they are near any body of water.

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## References

- <sup>1</sup> Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee *A six year review of drowning of children in Private Pools in New Zealand*. (unpublished) 26 June 2008;
- <sup>2</sup> Coggan C, Bennett S, Lee M, Patterson P. *Drowning in New Zealand: A study of mortality and morbidity data for all ages. Centre Report; Series No 90*. Injury Prevention Research Centre, University of Auckland, NZ January 2004.
- <sup>3</sup> Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee, Te Ropu Arotake Auau Mate o te Hunga Tamariki, Taiohi: *Fifth report to the Minister of Health: Reporting mortality 2002 - 2008*. Wellington, Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee: 2009
- <sup>4</sup> *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)* (Part 1; Article 19) Published Wellington, Commissioner for Children: 1992
- <sup>5</sup> Thompson D, Rivara F. *Pool fencing for preventing drowning in children*. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 1998(Issue 1):Art. No.: CD001047
- <sup>6</sup> Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee, Te Ropu Arotake Auau Mate o te Hunga Tamariki, Taiohi: *Fifth report to the Minister of Health: Reporting mortality 2002 - 2008*. (page 21) Wellington, Child and Youth Mortality Review Committee: 2009
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid* (page 20)
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid* ( page 22)
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid* (page 21)
- <sup>10</sup> Peden, Margie; Oyegbite, Kayode; Ozanne-Smith, Joan; Hyder, Adnan A; Branche, Christine; Rahman AKM Fazlur; Rivara, Fedrick; Bartolomeos Kidist; *World report on child injury prevention*; (Page 20) World Health Organisation/UNICEF: Geneva, Switzerland; 2008
- <sup>11</sup> McDonald, Taylor, Cater & Ward; *Circumstances surrounding drowning in those under 25 (1980-2002)* Child & Youth Mortality Review Committee in collaboration with Water Safety New Zealand 2005