

Managing water hazards in preschool

Policy and procedures

Document title	Managing water hazards in preschool
Contact details	Early Childhood Education and Care
Approved by	Executive Director Early Years and Education Services
Date approved	March 2022
Document review	Every 3 years
TRM number	50:D20:78905

Version	Date	Author	Changes made
3.1	30 January 2020	Operational Policy Coordination Unit	Minor update to terminology and Northern Territory Government template
3.2	22 April 2020	Operational Policy Coordination Unit	Review for accessibility, readability and publishing standards
3.3	March 2022	Early Childhood Policy and Programs	Updated to a procedural document rather than a guideline. Preschools are no longer required to develop their own water safety procedures. Improved alignment with Education and Care Services National Law, Education and Care Services National Regulations and National Quality Standard

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1. Policy statement

Under the [Education and Care Services National Law \(NT\) \(National Law\)](#)¹ and [Education and Care Services National Regulations \(National Regulations\)](#)², preschools must have policies and procedures in place for managing water safety, including during water based activities. Preschool staff must identify and manage all water hazards and ensure children are provided with a safe and stimulating environment. No child will be left unattended when in proximity to water.

If preschool children are participating in a swimming program, the [School swimming, water safety programs and aquatic activities policy](#)³ must be followed.

Where the preschool teacher is planning an excursion, the Department of Education's (the department) [Excursions policy, procedures and supporting documents](#)⁴ must be followed and any potential water hazards identified and addressed within the Excursion risk assessment.

These procedures must be followed when undertaking water play activities as part of the preschool program and to manage water hazards in the preschool environment.

2. Definitions

Adequate supervision is knowing where children are at all times and monitoring their activities actively and diligently. The educator must be in a position to respond immediately to individual needs, particularly when a child is distressed or in a hazardous situation.

Preschool staff refers to preschool teachers, assistant teachers, preservice teachers, volunteers and any other person who is contributing to the delivery of education and care to children attending the preschool.

Water hazard is any vessel that can hold water to a depth of 5cm and accommodate a child's nose and mouth, including:

- sinks, basins, fish tanks, fish bowls, baths
- swimming pools, portable pools, spas either on site or neighbouring
- water courses, ponds, sandpits, clam shells
- water troughs, containers and buckets used for play, animal drinking containers
- poor drainage areas that allow water to pool.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Principals hold the responsibilities of the nominated supervisor and are therefore responsible for:

- ensuring preschool facilities and resources are well maintained and appropriate to the education and care needs of preschool aged children
- ensuring their preschool operates in accordance with the National Law, National Regulations and the department's policies, including these procedures
- ensuring that if there is a swimming pool or spa located on the preschool premises, the safety barrier or fence is compliant with the [Swimming Pool Safety Act 2004](#)⁵

¹ <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/education-and-care-services-national-law-act-2010/012>

² <https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/regulation/2011/653>

³ <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/swimming-and-water-safety>

⁴ <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/managing-school-operations/managing-school-operations/excursions>

⁵ <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Legislation/SWIMMING-POOL-SAFETY-ACT-2004>

- ensuring that at least one school staff member who holds a current approved first aid, anaphylaxis and asthma qualification, is located at, or immediately available to, the preschool at all times that children are in attendance.

Preschool teachers are responsible for:

- providing a child safe environment appropriate to the education and care needs of preschool aged children
- ensuring that all water hazards in the preschool environment are identified through regular risk assessments and managed appropriately
- communicating these procedures during inductions and on an ongoing basis to ensure all preschool staff are aware of their responsibilities relating to water safety, supervision and removal of water hazards
- ensuring the preschool program provides adequate opportunities for water play and water safety discussions with children
- ensuring that children are adequately supervised at all times when engaging in water play or other water related activities
- ensuring all staff are aware of the first aid emergency action plan and their responsibilities in the event of a first aid emergency.

Preschool staff and volunteers are responsible for:

- providing adequate supervision at all times that children are playing with or around water and ensuring water hazards are removed
- following these procedures and implementing risk mitigation strategies to ensure all water hazards in the preschool environment are managed appropriately.

4. Procedures

A risk assessment approach is to be taken to identify, assess and manage water hazards associated with a preschool's physical environment and water play activities. The [Preschool risk assessment template](#) is to be used to guide and document the risk assessment process.

The [ACECQA Risk assessment and management information sheet](#)⁶ also provides useful information about how to identify, assess and manage risks.

4.1. Water hazard inspections

The preschool teacher will ensure that the preschool premises are inspected to identify and remove or mitigate any water hazards including, but not limited to:

- inspecting the preschool premises, inside and outside, each morning to ensure that there are no containers or pools of water that may pose a risk to children
- inspecting outdoor play areas for safety after rain before allowing the children to enter the outdoor environment
- checking that buckets or sinks used for general cleaning are emptied immediately after use
- ensuring that fish tanks and fish bowls are at a height and location that would prevent a child from falling into them
- inspecting fencing around any pools, spas, fishponds or water features to ensure they are secure, in good repair and free from objects that would enable a child to gain access to these items.

⁶ https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/Risk_management_and_management.pdf

Any risk and mitigation strategies will be implemented and communicated to all staff and, where appropriate, the children.

The preschool teacher will report any maintenance issues to the school principal for actioning.

4.2. Water play activities

Despite water safety risks, water play remains an important educational tool as it provides children with opportunities to develop language, motor skills and science and maths concepts, as well as exposing them to sensory experiences and the natural environment. Playing with water can encourage children's active exploration and discovery of their world.

When undertaking water play activities as part of the preschool program:

- children must be adequately supervised at all times which means:
 - always maintaining sight and hearing of all children
 - being in a position to respond to individual needs
 - being in a position to intervene immediately when necessary
- preschool staff must ensure water troughs or containers for water play are filled to a level that is safe and appropriate for the activity that the children are undertaking. Containers or troughs must be emptied after use, preferably onto garden areas
- children must be discouraged from drinking the water used in water play activities
- environmental factors must be considered including weather conditions and melioidosis.

Excursions that involve water hazards or take place near water require careful planning to mitigate any potential risks. The ACECQA Excursions Risk Assessment Template must be completed for all excursions. Refer to the department's [Excursions policy, procedures and supporting documents](#)⁷.

Water safety messages should be incorporated into the preschool program whenever there are water activities. This may include discussions about water risks within the preschool and home environments.

4.3. Reporting requirements

In the event of a serious incident, the preschool must notify Quality Education and Care NT within 24 hours or as soon as the incident becomes known. The preschool must also notify the parents of the children involved as as soon as practicable after the incident.

Further information regarding child-related incidents, illness, injury or trauma is outlined in the department's [Recording and reporting student injuries guidelines and procedures](#)⁸.

5. Supporting documents and templates

[Preschool risk assessment template](#)

[ACECQA Risk assessment and management](#)⁹

⁷ <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/managing-school-operations/managing-school-operations/excursions>

⁸ <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/recording-and-reporting-student-injuries>

⁹ https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/Risk_management_and_management.pdf

6. Related legislation, policy and procedures

6.1. Legislation

The [Education and Care Services \(National Uniform Legislation\) Act 2011 \(NT\)](#)¹⁰ is the legislation that adopts the National Law in the NT. [The Schedule to the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 \(Vic\)](#)¹¹ sets out the National Law.

- Section 165 – Offence to inadequately supervise children
- Section 167 – Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazards

[Education and Care Services National Regulations](#)¹²

- Regulation 12 – Meaning of serious incident
- Regulation 101 – Conduct a risk assessment for excursion
- Regulation 168 – Education and care services must have policies and procedures
 - (2)(a)(iii) water safety, including safety during water-based activities
- Regulation 170 – Policies and procedures to be followed
- Regulation 171 – Policies and procedures to be kept available
- Regulation 172 – Notification of change to policies and procedures
- Regulation 176 – Time to notify certain information to Regulatory Authority

[Swimming Pool Safety Act 2004](#)

6.2. Department of Education policy, guidelines and procedures

Go to <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies> to access the following policies:

- School swimming, water safety programs and aquatic activities policy
- Excursions policy, procedures and supporting documents
- Recording and reporting student injuries, guidelines and procedures.

6.3. National Quality Standard

The following Elements of the [National Quality Standard](#)¹³ apply to this policy and procedure:

- Quality Area 1 – Educational program and practice
 - Element 1.2.1 – Educators are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions.
- Quality Area 2 – Children’s health and safety
 - Element 2.2.1 – At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.
- Quality Area 7 – Governance and leadership
 - Element 7.1.2 – Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/education-and-care-services-national-law-act-2010/012>

¹¹ <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/education-and-care-services-national-law-act-2010/012>

¹² <https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/regulation/2011/653>

¹³ <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard>