

2007 NSW Health Awards Entry

Entry Title
Water Watcher Armband – Keeping Kids Safe
Abstract
<p>Drowning is a leading cause of death among children aged five years or less. Through the development of a Water Watcher Armband, Kids Health at The Children’s Hospital at Westmead (CHW) aims to highlight the importance of adult supervision in preventing drowning incidents among children aged five years or less. The project is in line with the NSW Health Strategic Direction ‘Make prevention everyone’s business’ and ensures that at least one adult is watching children at all times during social gatherings in and around water.</p> <p>Approximately 14,500 armbands were produced and distributed to families in New South Wales, over the summers of 2005 and 2006. The results from an evaluation suggested that the project was well received and considered a success.</p>
Aim
To reduce the incidence of drowning and near drowning among children in New South Wales by raising the awareness of the importance of adult supervision in preventing drowning.
Nature of the Problem
<p>Drowning is a leading cause of death among children aged five years or less. Through an extensive literature search and based on recent research findings, Kids Health have established that one of the main contributing factors in drowning is a lack of direct adult supervision. Once CHW had highlighted the importance of adult supervision in preventing drowning, it was found that there was really very little education and support for parents on this important issue.</p>
Extent of the problem
<p>In New South Wales, approximately 11 children drown each year (NSW Child Death Review Team, 2005) with a further 90 children being hospitalised for near drowning (Population Health Division, 2004). Between January 1995 and April 2001, 82 children aged five years or less drowned in NSW with over 40% of these drowning incidents occurring in swimming pools.</p> <p>The NSW Injury Risk Management Centre has conducted research into the factors surrounding drowning incidences and identified a lack of direct adult supervision as an issue. Supervision played a role in all cases of drowning, with over 75% of children being left alone without adult supervision.</p>

Strategic importance

The Water Watcher Armband project is in line with the NSW Health Strategic Direction category 'Make prevention everybody's business'.

The project highlights the importance of adult supervision in preventing drowning or near drowning incidents and consequently, hospitalisations and/or fatalities among children aged five years or less. The key message of the project is that adult supervision of children near water is key in preventing drowning. This project also informs the NSW population about these three key messages which play a role in prevention:

- Familiarise your children with water
- Learn infant resuscitation
- Fence your pool and never leave the gate open

Planning and implementing solutions

To highlight the importance of child supervision in and around water, Kids Health at CHW developed the Water Watcher Armband. The armband bearing the message 'Supervise with your eyes' was designed for use during outdoor gatherings to ensure that at least one adult was watching children at all times. The armband was chosen for both its durability and transferability between adults. It was also favoured due to its easy identification from most angles; children and other parents can clearly identify the adult supervising the children in and around the pool.



Figure 1: The Water Watcher Armband

An information card titled 'Supervise with your eyes...keep watch' was also developed which provided details on how to utilise the armband and the following three key messages:

- Familiarise your children with water.
- Learn infant resuscitation.
- Fence your pool and never leave the gate open.

On the reverse were details of the resuscitation procedures for use during an emergency. These resuscitation techniques were changed on the card during the project re-launch in 2006, when the guidelines were updated by the Australian Resuscitation Council (ARC).



Figure 2: The front and back of the information card

Approximately 14,500 armbands and information cards were produced and distributed to families in New South Wales, over the summers of 2005 and 2006. The distribution was progressed through the Hospital and public swimming pools across the state. Advertising was done through the Kids Health Website, Hospital intranet and media sources which included local newspapers, The Daily Telegraph and the Today show on Channel 9.

Outcomes and Evaluation

All of the armband recipients, whose contact details we were able to obtain, were invited to complete a survey. In total, 2005 surveys were mailed or emailed to the armband recipients over the two years, with 483 surveys being completed. The project success is highlighted by the following results:

- 90% understood the main message of the armbands ("When in and around water, always have an adult closely supervising the children")
- 75% liked the presentation of the armband
- Over 50% revealed that the armband had persuaded them to change their child supervision techniques in and around water.

In addition, there were several comments received from the armband recipients which suggested that the project had a positive outcome.

Whilst it is difficult to correlate the success of this initiative with a decrease in drowning rates, the results are promising as there has been a substantial change in behaviour with adults who have used the Water Watcher Armband better supervising children around water.

Sustaining change

As with all educational campaigns it is important that the key messages be reinforced with

future target audiences (new parents with children of swimming age). We hope to re-run the campaign in coming years and better assess a change in behaviours and drowning rates. To sustain the message we are continuing to promote the message through our Hospital website.

http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/kidshealth/water_watcher/

Future Scope

This was an innovative idea undertaken and a full report of the findings will be made available on the Kids Health site which would allow those wanting to engage in similar health promotion initiatives to view both the values and drawbacks of such an undertaking. We plan to run the campaign again in the future and hope to see it adopted across NSW.

References

NSW Child Death Review Team, *Annual Report 2004. 2005*, NSW Commission for Children and Young People: Sydney.

Population Health Division, *The health of the people of New South Wales – Report of the Chief Health Officer. 2004*, NSW Department of Health: Sydney.