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# Learn online to save a life

Jason Dowling

What would you do if you saw someone floating in water? Would you know how to save a life?

This is the information St John Ambulance wants to deliver with WATERFirst, a free online water safety program launched today.

In Victoria, 47 people drowned last year - the highest number in a decade. Sixty almost drowned.

Rachel Hamment has a vivid memory of her two-year-old niece Elizabeth slipping silently into the water at a backyard pool.

Ms Hamment was sitting and talking with Elizabeth's mother, Emma, and other adults on the edge of the pool when the toddler entered the water. "I can still picture her in the water, still see her face and her blue and white shirt."

She quickly jumped up and grabbed Elizabeth and knew what to do, thanks to her first aid training.

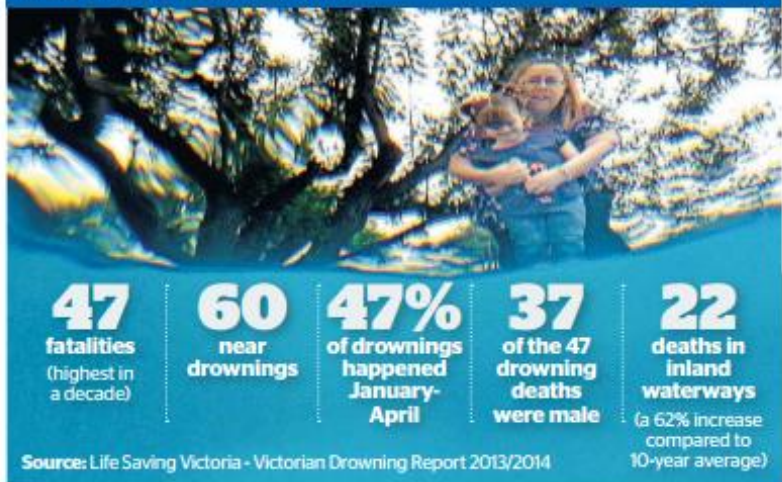
"I pulled her out and put her on her side, she spat out some water," she said.

Luckily Elizabeth was okay and her mother Emma is encouraging everyone to be extra vigilant with children around water and to know what to do in an emergency.

St John Ambulance Victoria chief executive Stephen Horton said statistics clearly showed drownings were on the increase.

He said the new website was set up because "we believe in emergency scenarios around water, minutes matter, the ability to provide first aid could make all the difference ... We want someone

## DROWNINGS IN VICTORIA Last Financial Year



trained in every workplace, household and public gathering to administer first aid."

Mr Horton said the risk of children under four years drowning in pools, or in the bathtub at home, was massive.

"It is our mission to save lives through first aid. We want to make sure Victorians have access to a free, online first aid course," he said.

While the online course was not a substitute for face-to-face first aid training "it will give you the capacity to provide first aid and be able to respond to emergencies around water", he said.

The key strategy in the St John training is DRSABCD - danger, response, send for help, airway, breathing, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and defibrillation.

Paul Shannon, from Life Saving Victoria, said inland waterways like rivers, creeks and lakes needed to become a focus for water safety.

These areas had overtaken the ocean for the highest number of drownings.

Mr Shannon said more than a quarter of drowning deaths in inland waterways involved alcohol, and fatalities in the 15-24 year-old and over 60 age groups were up.

Many drownings happened when people were on their own "so the need to have a friend with you is important".

He had a clear message: "Assess your own capabilities, learn how to swim and understand water safety."

For information on the WATERFirst program, visit [waterfirstaid.com.au](http://waterfirstaid.com.au)