

NCIS FACT SHEET

Sport and recreation deaths in Australia

3231

sport and recreation
deaths, 2001-2017

190

deaths per year
on average

31.9%

of deaths involved
swimming

Cases are included where death was due to injury sustained in the context of a sport or physical recreation activity or a professional sporting event. These are collectively referred to as **sport and recreation deaths**

Sports injuries in Australia

Sport and physical recreation are popular in the Australian community, and participation in these activities contributes positively to health and well being (1). However, these activities involve risks which may result in injury - or even death. In 2016-17 alone, 58,500 people were hospitalised for sports injuries in Australia (2).

Sport and recreation deaths

There were 3231 sport and recreation deaths reported to an Australian coroner between 2001 and 2017. In 62 of these deaths, the person was engaged in the activity in a professional capacity.

Sport and recreation deaths occurred in a higher proportion of males (85.3%) than females (14.7%). Male deaths were most common in those aged 25 - 44 years, and in females in those aged 45 - 64 years.

Drowning, vehicle incidents and falls were the most common mechanisms of fatal injury.

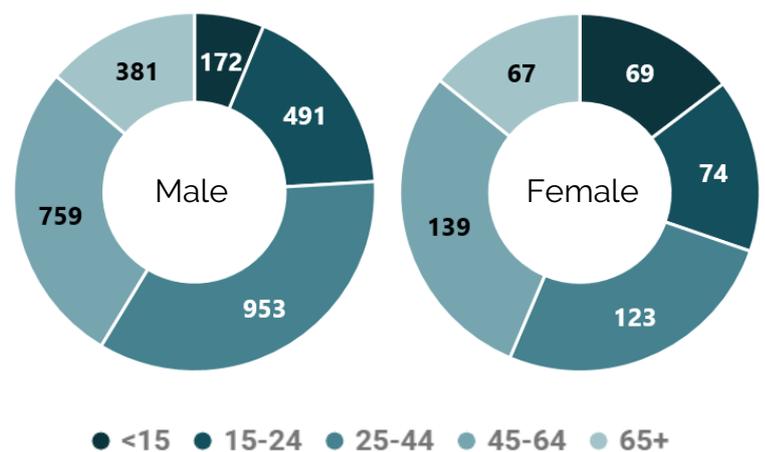


Figure 1. Frequency of sport and recreation deaths by age group and sex
Age unknown in three cases



61.0%

DROWNING



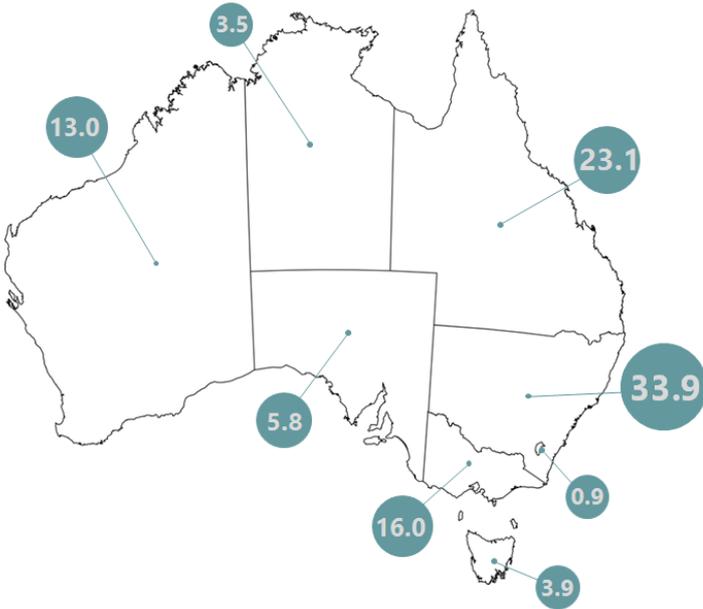
20.1%

VEHICLE INCIDENTS



7.7%

FALLS



The largest proportion of deaths were reported to a coroner in New South Wales, followed by Queensland and Victoria (Figure 2).

63.8% of fatal sport and recreation incidents occurred in a countryside location

Figure 2. Proportion of sport and recreation deaths by jurisdiction of investigation

Water and boating activities

Includes individual water sports, boating sports and team water sports

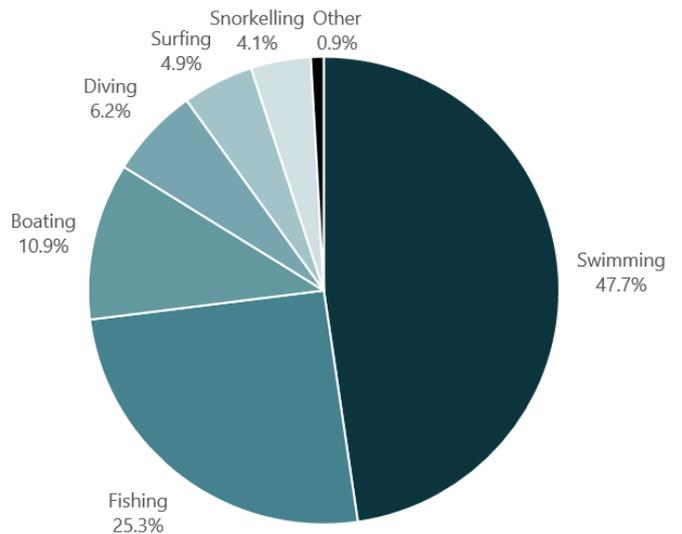
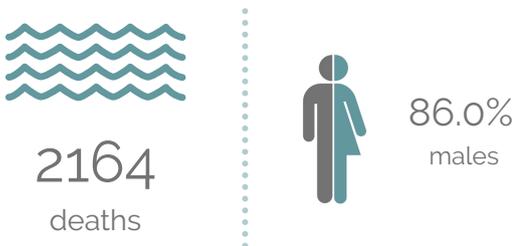


Figure 3. Proportion of water and boating deaths by activity type

Over two thirds (67.0%) of sport and recreation deaths involved water and boating activities. The majority of these deaths were due to drowning (89.6%).

There were 1032 fatal swimming incidents. These most commonly occurred in the ocean (Figure 4).

Nearly one third of the 548 fatal fishing incidents involved rock fishing (n=170).

Drugs or alcohol contributed to death in 10.4% (n=224) of fatal water and boating incidents.

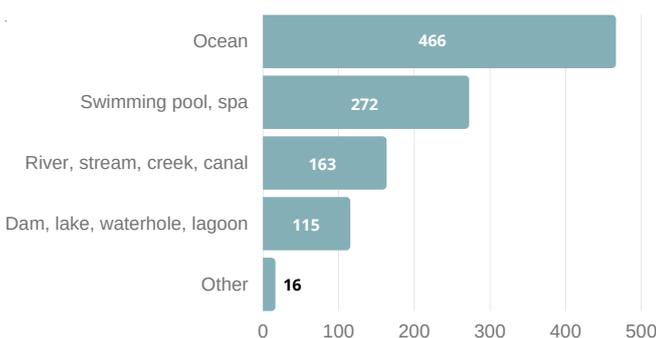


Figure 4. Frequency of swimming deaths by body of water

Wheeled activities

Includes wheeled motor sports and wheeled non-motored sports



551
deaths



92.0%
males

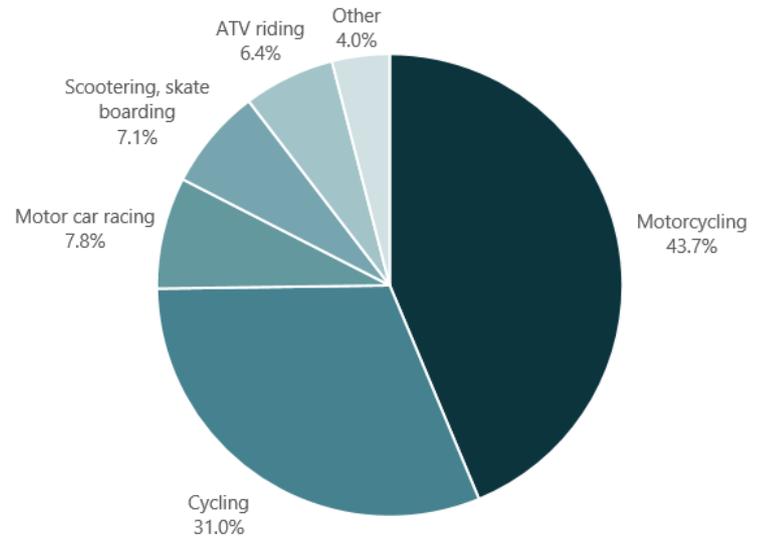


Figure 5. Proportion of wheeled activity deaths by activity type

There were 551 deaths in which the person was engaged in wheeled activities such as cycling, skate boarding or car racing. Of these, 241 involved motorcycling.

Motorcycling deaths were most common among persons aged 15 - 24 years (37.8%, n=91). By contrast, cycling deaths were most common among those aged 45 - 64 years (36.8%, n=63).



33.1% of motor car racing and motorcycling incidents occurred at a racetrack



28.6% of all-terrain vehicle (ATV) riding deaths were of children under 15 years



81.3% of cycling deaths were due to road cycling incidents

Aero activities

Includes aero sport instructors, pilots and participants



130
deaths



89.4%
males



parachuting,
sky diving



hang gliding,
paragliding, parasailing



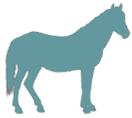
gliding

There were 130 deaths involving aero activities such as sky diving, paragliding and aircraft aerobatics.

Aero sporting incidents frequently resulted in multiple fatalities. For example, where both a skydiving instructor and tandem passenger were fatally injured. There were ten separate incidents that collectively resulted in 27 deaths.

Equestrian activities

Includes all equestrian sports and training activities



114
deaths



57.0%
females

Trail or general horseback riding was the most common activity type in equestrian activity deaths (52.6%, n=60).

In 30 equestrian activity deaths, the person was undertaking paid work at the time of the incident.

Adventure activities

Includes all adventure sports



96
deaths



82.3%
males

The majority of adventure activity deaths (56.3%) were attributable to falls, most frequently from cliffs.

The most common activity types were bushwalking or hiking (38.3%) and rock climbing or abseiling (29.8%).

ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES



59
deaths

54 involved
running or
walking

TARGET AND PRECISION SPORTS



33
deaths

16 involved
firearm
shooting

ICE AND SNOW SPORTS



28
deaths

18 involved
skiing

TEAM BALL SPORTS



28
deaths

13 involved
rugby

1. Eime RM, Harvey JT, Charity MJ & Payne WR 2016. Population levels of sport participation: implications for sport policy. BMC Public Health 16:752.

2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW): Kreisfeld R & Harrison JE 2020. Hospitalised sports injury in Australia, 2016–17. Cat. no. INJCAT 211. Injury Research and Statistics Series no. 131. Canberra: AIHW.

The data presented in this fact sheet was extracted from the National Coronial Information System (NCIS) in April 2020. The dataset extracted contained every fatality reported to an Australian coroner between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2017 where the death was due to unintentional external cause(s), and where the deceased was engaged in a sport or recreation activity. Visit the NCIS website for information on [data sources and limitations](#). To request a comprehensive data report, contact the NCIS or visit www.ncis.org.au.

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