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Herald Sun

## Swimming lessons Melbourne: Program to help families pay for classes

**More than 140,000 Victorian children missed out on weekly swimming lessons during lockdown. A national plan has been launched to help them get back into the pool.**

[Lucy Callander](#),

November 16, 2020 6:00am



A national campaign to help families pay for swimming lessons will help kids relearn skills lost during lockdown, water safety experts say.

On Monday Swimming Australia celebrated the start of SwimSAFER Week by launching a national Swim It Forward program.

The initiative aimed to help more families afford swimming lessons by asking people to donate the equivalent of one lesson (or just \$20) to Swim Australia.

Swim Australia CEO Brendon Ward said the campaign would encourage parents to prioritise swimming lessons.

“All physical activity is important, but we want parents to view swimming as a non-negotiable skill their child must learn, especially if they are under five,” he said.

“No other activity has the same lifesaving lessons as learning to swim does.”

Water safety experts said getting kids back into weekly swimming lessons was critical to avoid a deadly summer after more than 140,000 Victorian children missed out on classes during lockdown.

According to the Victorian Aquatic Industry Alliance (VAIA) the state’s drowning death toll increased by 300 per cent since July.

There were 12 drowning deaths – nine more than the five year average – and in August and September alone five children aged two and under lost their lives in the water.

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Most recently Kanady Moo, 13, [drowned in the Werribee River](#) on Melbourne Cup Day, November 4.

The Alliance said a decline in skill since lessons stopped in March contributed to the shocking increase in drowning rates.

Kingswim, which runs 13 centres across Victoria, said 16,000 children missed out on weekly lessons during lockdown.

However, Kingswim area manager Anne Brown said children’s ability to learn and regain old skills was “extremely promising”.

“By getting kids back to developmentally crucial activities like swimming lessons, we cannot only return to a sense of routine and normalcy, but also turn the predictions on drowning around,” she said.

She encouraged families to consider putting swimming lessons under the Christmas tree for their children and grandchildren.

“Many families will be doing it tough this year, so instead of toys that are likely to be forgotten in a matter of months, I urge everyone to consider what gifts will make a difference this year.”

Demand for lessons was high prior to Kingswim centres reopening on November 9 and about 6000 families had registered interest in a place.

The current limit of 20 people in the centres at a time had significantly reduced opportunities but there were still some bookings available.

Peninsula Aquatic and Recreation Centre (PARC) swim manager Julia Woods said swimming lessons had been prioritised since the centre reopened.

“We introduced a five week program for children aged 3 – 10 years and we were inundated,” Ms Woods said.

The program – offered to existing members only – was fully booked.

“As restrictions ease we will look at ways to offer more lessons to ensure children have the skills they need to be safe in and around the water,” she said.

Donations for ‘Swim It Forward’ can be made at [www.swimsafer.org.au](http://www.swimsafer.org.au).