



West Australian
Monday 16/11/2020

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Make a splash and put swim lessons top of the list

KATE EMERY

Parents are being urged to prioritise swimming lessons over other extracurricular activities such as football and dancing as research shows more than half of Australian children are not being taught how to swim.

Research out today from Swim Australia shows 55 per cent of children do not attend lessons and 41 per cent of

parents have no intention of enrolling their child. And while time and money were cited as reasons for parents not enrolling their children, the research also found 52 per cent of children attended another activity such as football or dancing.

Retired Olympic gold medallist Bill Kirby, who owns WA's Kirby Swim swimming school, said he believed some families believed they could simply wait for free

school swimming lessons rather than pay for private ones. Over the past 10 years, he said he had seen more families struggle to pay for year-round lessons as the cost of living rose.

But Mr Kirby warned that it was "too easy to be complacent". "Things happen very, very quickly and very, very silently," he said.

The pandemic has led to a shortage of swimming teachers,

with many of those who had lost their casual jobs going on to other industries. The Swim Australia research coincided with Swim Safer Week. It found 30 per cent of families surveyed had experienced a water-related emergency and one-in-three parents were not confident in their child's ability to handle such an emergency.

Swim Australia chief executive Brendon Ward said parents

should prioritise swimming for their children. "So much of our Australian culture involves the water," he said. "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."

Swim Australia has Swim It Forward campaign aims to raise money to help families who cannot afford lessons.



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Bill Kirby with Oscar Krummel, Keira Barnaby, Annabelle Hicks and Mia Austin at Kirbyswim in Bicton.
Picture: Jackson Flindell