



SB 855 (Newman): Childhood Drowning Data Collection Pilot Program**Co-sponsors:**

American Academy of Pediatrics, California
California State Alliance of YMCAs

Staff Contact: Erin Carvalho, erin.carvalho@sen.ca.gov

SUMMARY

SB 855 will create a statewide childhood drowning data collection system through a three-year pilot program to be administered by the Department of Public Health (CDPH). The program will collect detailed data on childhood drownings and near-drownings which result in significant health consequences, focusing on swimming pool incidents among children aged one through four years old. The data collected will help inform prospective public policies designed to decrease instances of childhood drownings.

ISSUE

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in California, drowning is the leading cause of accidental death among one- to four-year-olds, and the second-leading cause of accidental death among five- to nine-year-olds.ⁱ Moreover, despite recent changes in state law intended to reduce childhood drownings, the state has seen an increase in fatal pool drownings of one- to four-year-olds in recent years. In 2018, the death rate for one to four-year-olds was 1.5 out of 100,000. In 2019, that rate increased to 1.6, and then increased again to 1.8 in 2020. Nearly 70 percent of those cases occurred in residential swimming pools.ⁱⁱ For children who survive drownings, a large number experience lifelong disabilities that range from minor to severe. A 2020 report from the California Department of Developmental Services reported a caseload of 768 individuals who require lifelong services as a result of a near-drowning, representing a significant long-term cost to the state.ⁱⁱ

Further, despite the obvious urgency of preventing childhood drownings, envisioning policy solutions from a holistic and statewide perspective can be difficult because critical links are missing in the data as a result of reporting lapses by some groups, communities, and pool sites. This is due to the fact that California does not employ a uniform statewide childhood death reporting system. Reporting to the CDPH is managed on a regional basis and dependent upon county child death review teams, which overall are characterized by a lack of consistent reporting. As a result, the data is often inconsistent and incomplete, thereby hampering the identification and monitoring of trends and risk factors, and hindering the evaluation of prevention strategies. The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommends that states establish systematic reporting on the circumstances of drowning in order to develop best practices, community interventions, and relevant public policies.ⁱⁱⁱ

SOLUTION

Over a three-year term, SB 855 will establish a statewide drowning data collection system with consistent reporting and analysis to aid in the development of effective strategies and policies for drowning prevention at the state and local levels.

Under the bill's provisions, in the first two years of the pilot program:

- The CDPH will collaborate with five to 10 county child death review teams or other local agencies that collect data on childhood drowning and near-drowning.

- The CDPH will submit two reports on the progress and findings of the data collection pilot program to the appropriate legislative policy committees, one by April 1, 2024, and the second by April 1, 2025.

In the third and final year of the program:

- The CDPH will, by June 30, 2026, consult with an advisory group of experts on childhood drowning prevention and submit a comprehensive final report to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees. This report will include recommendations regarding the ideal structure and operations of an ongoing system to collect child drowning data which may be used to develop policies and best practices.
- Finally, the CDPH will develop a comprehensive California Water Safety Action Plan for Children that emulates the U.S. National Water Safety Plan, and seek to implement the recommendations on a statewide level.

For funding, this program will be funded through Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant Program monies currently allocated to the Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect Surveillance (FCANS) Program, which tracks reporting of all childhood fatalities.

SUPPORT

American Academy of Pediatrics, California (*co-sponsor*)

California State Alliance of YMCAs (*co-sponsor*)

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control. WISQARS™ — Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System
<https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>.

ⁱⁱ California Department of Developmental Services. <https://www.dds.ca.gov/initiatives/drowning-prevention/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sarah A. Denny, Linda Quan, Julie Gilchrist, Tracy McCallin, Rohit Sheno, Shabana Yusuf, Jeffrey Weiss, Benjamin Hoffman
Pediatrics Aug 2021, 148 (2) e2021052227; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2021-052227