



Ontario Non-Fatal Drowning Report, 2025

Prepared for the Lifesaving Society Ontario by the Drowning Prevention Research Centre Canada

Drowning is often thought of as fatal; however, drowning that does not result in death (non-fatal drowning) happens more frequently than fatal drowning, and can lead to life-long health issues. For every **fatal drowning** in Ontario, there are nearly **four non-fatal drowning incidents** that are serious enough to require an emergency department visit.

164

Average number of
drowning deaths
each year*

103

Average
hospitalizations
due to non-fatal
drowning each year

585

Average emergency
department visits
due to non-fatal
drowning each year

Drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid.

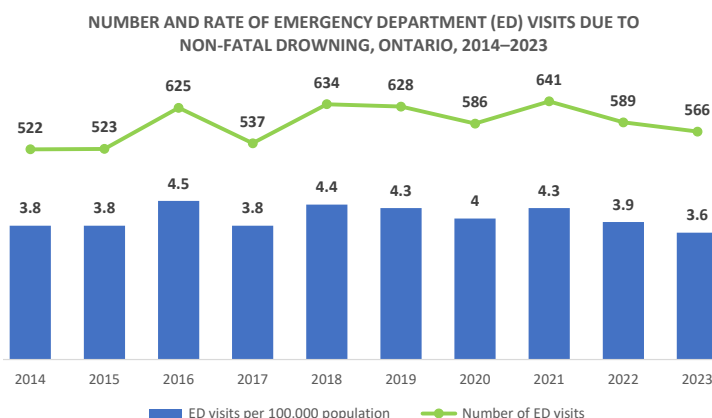
Drowning can be **fatal** or **non-fatal**. In **non-fatal drowning**, the respiratory impairment is stopped before death. Non-fatal drowning can result in a range of outcomes, from no injuries to serious injuries or permanent disability.

The 2025 Ontario non-fatal drowning report provides new information on non-fatal drowning by including more specific age groups to describe non-fatal drowning among children. The data was made available by Public Health Ontario, based on the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) National Ambulatory Care Reporting System (NACRS).^{1,2}

The full burden of non-fatal drowning is unknown. This report does not include non-fatal drowning incidents where the person was treated at the scene of the drowning and did not seek further medical attention, those who attended a family physician or clinic, and those who did not receive any treatment at all. If data from these sources were available, the number of non-fatal drownings included in this report would be even higher.

Emergency department visits and hospitalizations due to non-fatal drowning

During 2014–2023, there were 5,851 emergency department visits due to non-fatal drowning, an average of 585 per year. The rate† of visits decreased to 3.9 per 100,000 in 2022 (589 visits), and 3.6 per 100,000 in 2023 (566 visits), the lowest rate during the 10-year period.



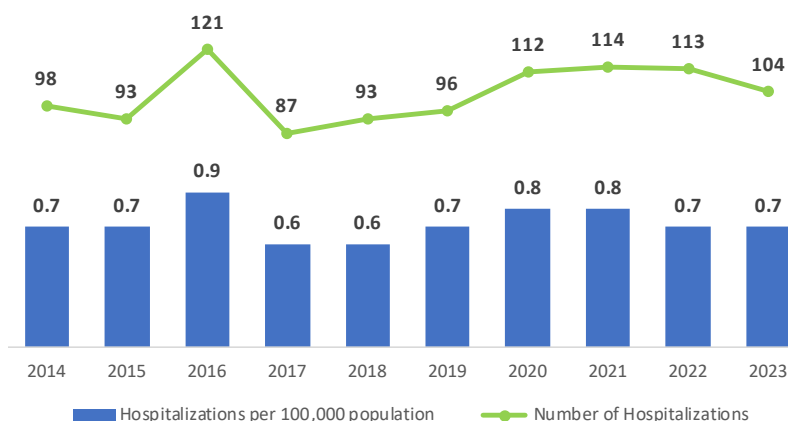
*Average number of water-related fatalities per year where drowning was a primary or contributory cause of death in Ontario, during the most recent 10 years for which data were available, 2012–2021.¹

† All rates in this report are crude annual rates per 100,000 population.

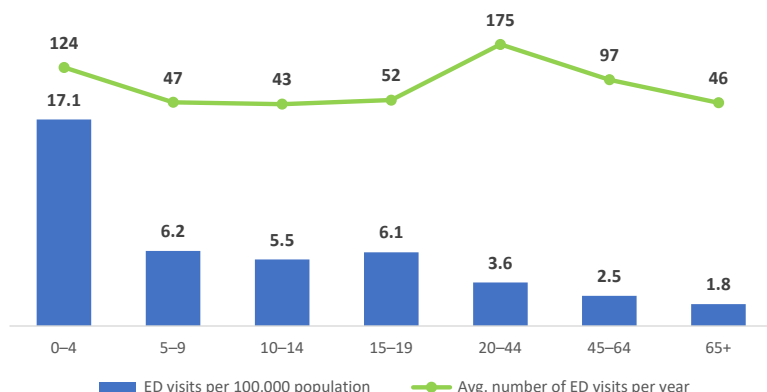
During 2014–2023, 1,031 patients were hospitalized after being transferred from an emergency department due to non-fatal drowning, an average of 103 per year.

*When compared to fatal drowning, there were **3.6 times the number of non-fatal drowning incidents serious enough to require an emergency department visit.***

NUMBER AND RATE OF HOSPITALIZATIONS DUE TO NON-FATAL DROWNING, ONTARIO, 2014–2023



NUMBER AND RATE OF EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT (ED) VISITS DUE TO NON-FATAL DROWNING BY AGE GROUP, ONTARIO, 2014–2023



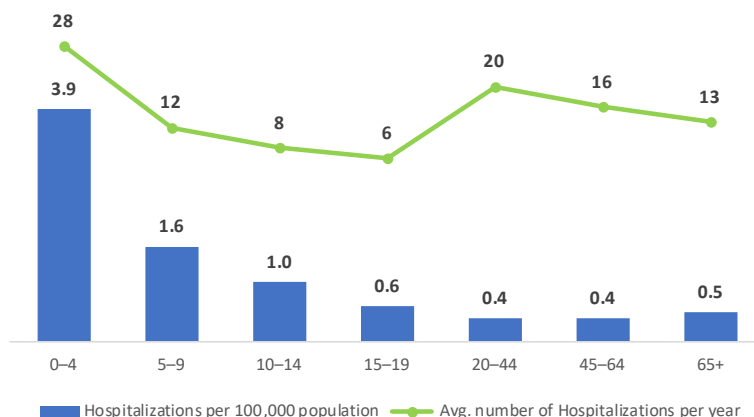
Age

Young children (aged less than 5 years) had the highest rate of emergency department visits for non-fatal drowning (17.1 per 100,000). During 2014–2023, 1,235 0–4-year-olds attended an emergency department for non-fatal drowning, an average of 124 per year. The next highest rates were among 5–9-year-olds (6.2 per 100,000) and 15–19-year-olds (6.1 per 100,000). Among adults, rates declined as age group increased, ranging from 6.2 per 100,000 among 5–9-year-olds to 1.8 per 100,000 for older adults aged 65+ years.

The rate of hospitalizations for non-fatal drowning was also highest among young children; 278 0–4-year-olds were hospitalized due to non-fatal drowning during 2014–2023, an average of 28 per year.

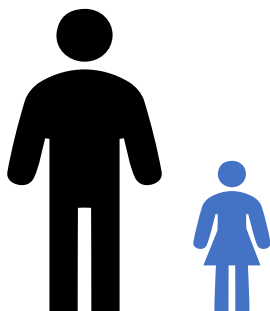
By comparison, the highest fatal drowning rates in Ontario occur among older adults 65+ (1.9 per 100,000 population) followed by 20–34-year-olds (1.5 per 100,000).³

NUMBER AND RATE OF HOSPITALIZATIONS DUE TO NON-FATAL DROWNING BY AGE GROUP, ONTARIO, 2014–2023



Sex

The rate of emergency department visits and hospitalizations from non-fatal drowning was nearly twice as high among males as females. Almost two thirds (62%) of emergency department visits due to non-fatal drowning occurred among males, accounting for an average of 360 visits per year (5.0 per 100,000 population). The rate of emergency department visits due to non-fatal drowning for females was 3.0 per 100,000, an average of 225 visits per year. Similarly, 64% of hospitalizations for non-fatal drowning were male, contributing to an average of 66 hospitalizations per year (0.9 per 100,000). The rate of hospitalizations due to non-fatal drowning among females was 0.5 per 100,000, with an average of 37 per year. By comparison, almost 8 out of 10 fatal drowning incidents in Ontario occur among males.³



Males accounted for approximately two-thirds of non-fatal drownings, this differs from fatal drowning where males account for close to 80%.

Did you know?

The Drowning Prevention Research Centre Canada worked with global experts on a categorization framework for non-fatal drowning. This will enable more comprehensive reporting on non-fatal drowning and contribute to a better understanding of the full burden of drowning. With this framework, the severity of non-fatal drowning can be categorized based on the degree of respiratory impairment, and morbidity (decline from previous functional capacity) caused by the non-fatal drowning.

Draft Non-Fatal Drowning Categorization Framework (NDCF)⁴

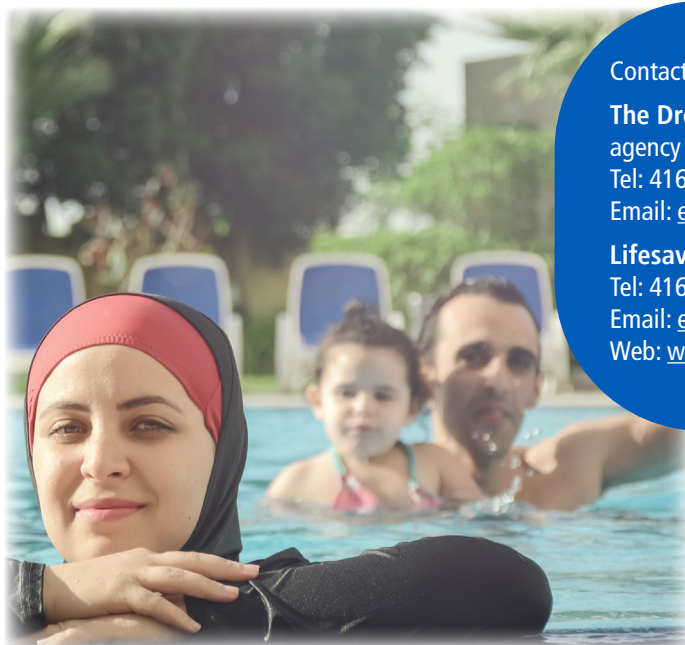
Severity of respiratory impairment after the drowning process stopped.		
Mild impairment	Moderate impairment	Severe impairment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Involuntary distressed coughing ANDFully alert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Sustained difficulty breathing AND/ORDisoriented but conscious	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Not breathing AND/ORUnconscious
Morbidity category (based upon any decline from previous functional capacity) at the time of measurement.		
No morbidity	Some morbidity	Severe morbidity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">No decline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Some decline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Severe decline

More work is needed. This report provides a brief overview of non-fatal drowning in Ontario based on emergency department and hospitalization data. Further research is needed to (1) estimate the full burden of non-fatal drowning, including incidents that are not captured in these sources; and (2) obtain more details about the circumstances of non-fatal drowning incidents and how and why these incidents differ from fatal drowning. The Drowning Prevention Research Centre Canada acknowledges that fatal drowning is only one part of the problem and is committed to more accurate reporting of the full burden of drowning.

Summary

- Drowning can be fatal or non-fatal; non-fatal drowning can result in serious lifelong disability.
- During January 1, 2014 to December 31, 2023 there were 5,851 emergency department visits and 1,031 hospitalizations due to non-fatal drowning.
- Emergency department visits and hospitalizations due to non-fatal drowning decreased in 2023.
- Non-fatal drowning rates are highest among children and youth, especially among young children 0–4 years of age, this differs from fatal drowning where rates are highest among older people.
- Males accounted for approximately two-thirds of non-fatal drowning incidents, this differs from fatal drowning where males account for close to 80%.

For every one fatal drowning, there are nearly four non-fatal drowning incidents that require a visit to an emergency department. Non-fatal drowning is a serious problem in Ontario that can have lifelong consequences for individuals and families.



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References

¹ Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Snapshots: Emergency Department Visits for injuries Snapshot: Emergency department visits for injuries due to near-drowning or submersion. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; c2025 [updated 2025 Apr 22; cited 2025 Jun]. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/injuries-data/injury-er-visits>

² Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Snapshots: Hospitalizations for injuries Snapshot: Hospitalizations for injuries due to near-drowning or submersion. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; c2025 [updated 2025 Apr 22; cited 2025 Jun]. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/injuries-data/injury-hospitalization>

³ Lifesaving Society. Ontario Drowning Report, 2025 Edition. Toronto, ON: Drowning Prevention Research Center Canada; c2023.

⁴ Beerman, S. Bierens, J.J.L.M., Clemens, T., Meddings, D., Rahman, A., Szpilman, D. Clarification and Categorization of Non-fatal Drowning: A draft Position Statement; c2019. Available from https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/drowning/non-fatal-drowning-categorization.pdf?sfvrsn=44d18cc1_2&download=true