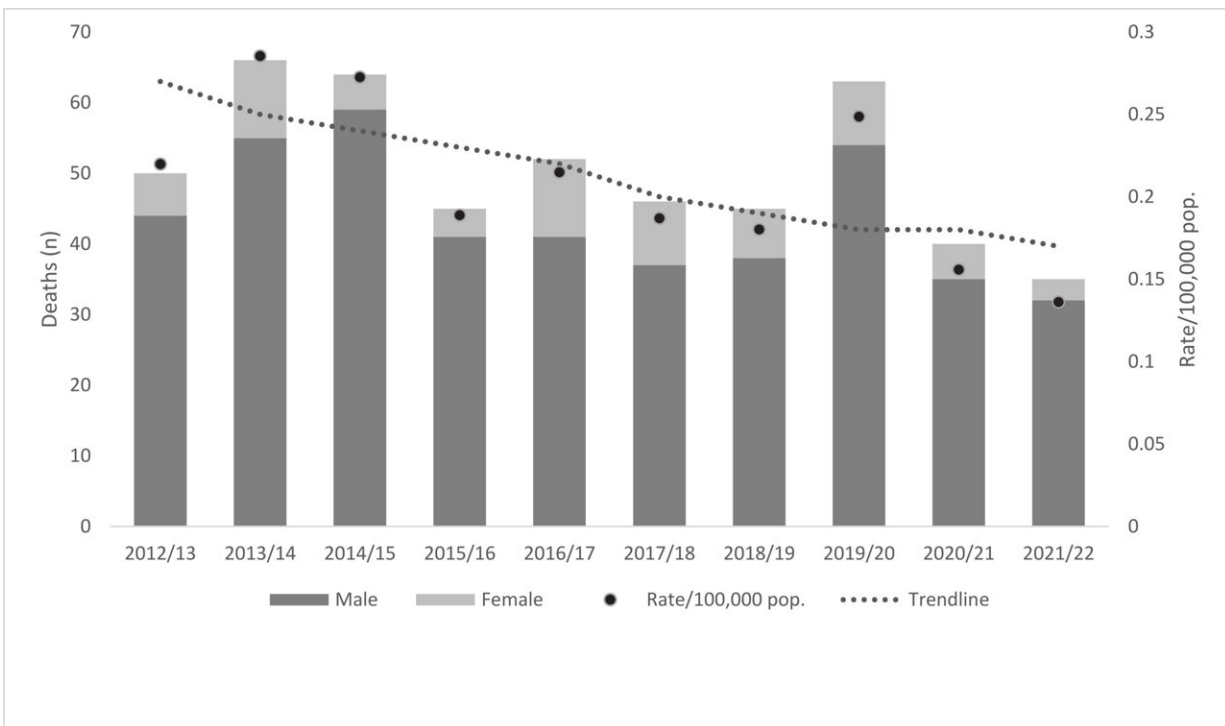


Hearts not sharks are a major killer on Aussie beaches

March 22 2024



Number and rate of deaths by sex, July 1, 2012, to June 30, 2022. Trendline visualizes annual Joinpoint regression model estimates for the rate of non-drowning coastal fatalities across the Australian population July 1, 2012, to June 30, 2022. Credit: *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100113

[Research published today](#) in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* shows that almost 40% of deaths that occur in the coast are not drowning related, with cardiac conditions and traumatic injuries the major culprits.

The research conducted by Surf Life Saving Australia shows over half of these non-drowning deaths were due to cardiac conditions (51.8%), with other causes including traumatic/collision injuries (15.9%), falls (10.4%), and marine creatures (5%). Of all 1,667 deaths on the coast over a 10-year period, less than 2% were attributed to marine creatures of any kind, including jellyfish and sharks.

Lead researcher Sean Kelly from Surf Life Saving Australia says this is the first study of its kind into non-drowning fatalities on the coast and examined the causes of 620 non-drowning deaths that occurred over a 10-year period.

"Our research showed that males were 5.2 times more likely to die than females, with younger populations found to die disproportionately along the coast, with the primary causes being falls and traumatic/collision injuries."

"Those living in or visiting rural and [remote areas](#) were also found to be at higher risk, largely due to poorer access to services and longer incident response times."

"While sharks are often top-of-mind for those visiting the [beach](#), all [marine creatures](#), including sharks and jellyfish, only made up 5% of non-drowning deaths and less than 2% of overall coastal deaths."

Adam Weir, CEO of Surf Life Saving Australia, says that volunteer surf

lifesavers take a holistic approach to reducing risk on the coast and are highly trained to respond to a variety of situations along the coast.

"Even strong and experienced beachgoers can find themselves in circumstances where they need urgent help, for instance, because of a cardiac condition or traumatic injury. The number of deaths caused by [cardiac conditions](#) shows the importance of CPR training and defibrillator access, which greatly increase the chances of survival in these incidents."

"All our patrolling members have been trained in these skills, and responding to non-drowning incidents is a big part of what we do. I would encourage everyone to undergo CPR or First Aid training which is provided by Surf Life Saving in each State."

"Where possible, always swim at a patrolled beach between the red and yellow flags, or if you are at an unpatrolled location, swim with a buddy, and make sure you know what to do if you find yourself in a dangerous situation."

Surf Life Saving Australia Safety Tips:

- Swim at a patrolled beach between the red and yellow flags.
- Download the BeachSafe App or visit beachsafe.org.au to find a patrolled beach and for the latest safety advice.
- Always supervise children in, on, and around water.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs around water.
- Wear a lifejacket when boating, rock fishing or paddling.
- Check the conditions, including weather forecasts.

More information: Sean Kelly et al, Beyond drowning: Characteristics, trends, the impact of exposure on unintentional non-drowning coastal fatalities between 2012 and 22, *Australian and New*

Zealand Journal of Public Health (2024). DOI: [10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100113](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100113)

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