

Portable swimming pools, including the increasingly popular, inflatable models, pose serious risks to young children, experts warn. In a new study, investigators at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, detail the drowning deaths of more than 200 children under 12 years old linked to a variety of above-ground pools, some large and deep, others small and shallow. "About every five days a child drowns in a portable pool in the U.S.," said lead researcher Dr. Gary A. Smith, director of the hospital's Center for Injury Research and Policy. Because these pools are inexpensive and easy to assemble, many parents may not consider them as big a risk as in-ground pools, he said. The greatest risks are for children younger than 5 years, the researchers found.

"Safe Kids has been concerned about the increasing use of backyard pools that are too small for consumers to consider investing in fencing but too large to make them easy to empty and secure safely after each use," said Meri-K Appy, president of Safe Kids USA in a statement Friday. "This important study confirms our speculation that portable pools in backyards across America pose special risks to young children." For the study, Smith's team used 2001-2009 data from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. During this period, the researchers identified 209 drowning deaths and 35 near-drowning in children under 12. They found that 94 percent of the children were under 5 and most (56 percent) were boys. In addition, about three-quarters of the deaths took place in the child's own yard, usually during the summer. More than 40 percent of the drowning occurred when the child was being supervised; 39 percent happened with no adult supervision; and 18 percent were blamed on a lapse of supervision. About 40 percent of the drowning happened in a shallow wading pool, Smith said. "That's in 18 inches or less of water," Smith said. "Children can drown in very small amounts of water. Very young children can drown in a five-gallon bucket with water in the bottom. It only takes a couple of inches and a few minutes."

"Close supervision of young children around water is really important, but supervision alone isn't enough," he continued. While a variety of safety measures such as alarms and fencing are available for in-ground pools, Smith said, this is not the case for portable pools. The researchers call for industry development of affordable fencing and reliable pool alarms and covers for portable pools. Many techniques used to deny access to in-ground pools, such as fencing, cost more than a portable pool itself, he said. "We have to come up with other strategies that are affordable and effective for portable pools."

Experts said the study also raises concerns about pool ladders. "Most of the kids got into the pool using a ladder that was provided with the pool," Smith said. He suggested removing the pool ladder when no one is bathing and storing it where children can't get to it. Dr. Barbara Gaines, director of trauma and injury prevention at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, said that "this reminds us that while water is very inviting for children, it is also extremely hazardous." Parents need to be very watchful when their children are in and around water, including pools, ponds and bathtubs, Gaines said. "Never underestimate water."

Safe Kids promotes a pool-safety concept called "Lock, Look and Learn":

- *LOCK*: Erect fencing at least 4 feet high with a self-latching gate and keep it locked at all times unless an adult is present.
- *LOOK*: Parents and caregivers should watch children in or near the water at all times, and not socialize, read or sleep.
- *LEARN*: "Adults should learn to swim themselves and provide swimming lessons to their children from an early age," Appy said. They should also know how to respond to an emergency -- "use rescue equipment, call 911 and perform CPR," she added.
- Our building department is here to help with guidelines , inspections and means of barrier alternatives