

Tread with caution: Inflatable pools pose drowning hazard

What better way to keep cool in summertime than by splashing in a backyard pool? While large inflatable pools can be fun, they also can be hazardous – especially to children ages 5 years and younger.

Newer models of inflatable pools come in all shapes and sizes, from 2 feet to 4 feet deep and 18 feet wide, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

Because of their smaller size, inflatable pools often fall outside of building codes that require fencing, self-latching gates and other protective barriers to help block unattended children from entering the pool and drowning.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and CPSC are urging parents to think twice before setting up inexpensive, inflatable pools in their yards.

“The biggest fear is drowning,” according to Jeffrey C. Weiss, M.D., FAAP, member of the AAP Committee on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention. CPSC received reports of 17 drowning deaths in 2005, up from nine deaths the previous year.

Dive sticks also can be hazardous when used in small pools. These weighted sticks are tossed into a pool and will land upright at the pool’s bottom. Children can fall or land on dive sticks in shallow water and suffer impalement injuries.

Also dangerous are inflatable pool ladders. Children have fallen and become injured on flimsy ladders that accompany some models of inflatable pools, according to Dr. Weiss.

“The best safety precaution is to never leave children unattended near pools – even for a moment – and never leave pools set up when not in use,” said Dr. Weiss. Unattended children have drowned in the time it takes for a distracted adult to answer the phone, according to CPSC.

“Most kids don’t see inflatable pools as being the same danger as (permanent) swimming pools,” said Dr. Weiss. “(However) kids can drown in buckets. Kids can drown in toilets. Kids can drown in bathtubs with 5 to 6 inches of water or less.”

-Trisha Koriath
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