

Sep 25, 2008 7:58 pm US/Eastern

HealthWatch: Asthma & Chlorine

Swimming Offers Many Benefits, But Pools May Be The Best Place For People Suffering From Respiratory Condition



Reporting
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NEW YORK (CBS) — Swimming has countless health benefits, but new research has revealed a surprising risk that may take a toll on kids.

Asthma affects more than 300 million people and is the most common chronic illness in children. Since it's on the rise, researchers have been looking for possible environmental triggers. It seems one may be right in the backyard.

Swimming is an age-old childhood pastime, but new information shows outdoor chlorinated pools may increase a child's risk of developing asthma.



"Chlorine is very caustic to not only your nose and sinuses and your skin, but it's also caustic to your lungs," said Dr. Jordan S. Josephson a sinus and allergy specialist at St. Luke's-Roosevelt.

"There are a lot of things that we're starting to discover as being very, very hazardous to our health and especially in the most leisurely of activities," said Bill Morgan of the Bronx.

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According to a European Respiratory Journal study, children who swam outdoors one hour per week for 10 years, were five times more likely to be asthmatic than those who have never been in a pool.

"If I knew that chlorine would give my baby asthma I wouldn't be letting them swim in it or I would be more thoughtful about it," said Neely McNeill of the Upper West Side.

Children tend to linger and play in outdoor pools longer than indoor ones so they're exposed to more chlorine. And they're more likely to swallow chlorinated water or ingest the harmful vapors.

"It can give you sinus headaches, pressure, congestion, post nasal drip, and then wheezing, and then just that clamped down feeling of tightness in your chest," Dr. Josephson said.

Experts used to think indoor pools had stronger chlorine vapors because the air is trapped inside. But according to the study, even outside the vapors remain at the pool's surface and don't drift away.

"If the chlorine bothers you enough, you may have to go and search for a non-chlorinated pool," Dr. Josephson said.

Chlorine is not the only chemical that can be used to keep pools clean, but other alternatives may be even more irritating. For some children, the best bet is to stick to swimming in natural water sources like clean lakes or the ocean.



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5/2/2010