

Small Inflatable and Plastic Pools Can Spread Illness

Small inflatable pools and plastic pools (usually 3 to 5 feet diameter) or other small water play attractions (e.g., slides) have been associated with the spread of recreational water illnesses (RWIs). RWIs can be spread by swallowing or having contact with contaminated recreational water. These illnesses are caused by germs such as *Crypto* (*Cryptosporidium*), *E. coli* O157:H7, and *Shigella*¹.

Small inflatable and plastic pools are typically filled with tap water. Some people in the United States have a disinfectant in their tap water but this is not adequate to kill germs that may get into water used for swimming. Sources of information exist about how to disinfect these pools. However, it may not be practical to kill germs by adding chlorine bleach to small pools. This is because the chlorine dose cannot be easily determined or safely monitored to ensure that the right amount of chlorine continuously stays in the water. These pools also do not have filters to remove particles that could prevent the chlorine from working well. Using these types of pools increases the risk of spreading RWIs brought into the water by swimmers with a diarrheal illness.



The use of small inflatable and plastic pools in child care programs or schools should be discouraged. This includes small child care settings in private homes. The larger number of children from different families in child care settings and schools can increase the risk for spreading RWIs.

Children from one family or household are often bathed together so they are unlikely to be at increased risk of spreading diarrheal illness to each other if allowed to use the same inflatable or plastic pool. However, allowing larger numbers of children from different families to use these pools is likely to increase the risk of spreading diarrheal illnesses. Any household deciding to use these types of small pools should follow the steps below to reduce the spread of illness:

Before Use

- Do not allow a child who is ill with diarrhea or vomiting to use the pool.
- Give children a cleansing soap shower or bath before they swim.
- Talk to parents or caregivers about their children's health before these children use the pool.

During Use

- Remind children to avoid getting pool water in their mouths.
- Respond to feces in the pool or a child with a dirty diaper.
 - Clear the pool of children, empty, and then clean it. In the case of diarrheal incidents, once the pool has been cleaned and is completely dry, leave it in the sun for at least four hours.

After Use

- Drain or empty the pool. Medium and larger-sized inflatable and plastic pools that cannot be emptied daily should have filters and appropriate disinfection systems that meet the same codes and requirements as full-sized swimming pools.
- Clean the pool and allow it to dry. Once the pool is completely dry, leave it in the sun for at least four hours.

Remember that these small pools can also pose a drowning hazard if not properly supervised or enclosed. Local swimming pool codes may require fences around small inflatable and plastic pools².

1. For more information about healthy swimming, visit www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming.
2. For more information about pool safety, visit www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prere/prhtml06/06164.html.