

WADING POOLS

Wading pools have been identified as potential sources of disease transmission and as safety hazards.

- Recommendations from the *Caring for Our Children National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs* (Third Edition, Standard 6.3.5.3: Portable Wading Pools) states that portable wading pools should not be permitted in childcare settings.
- Minnesota childcare licensing rules, for both childcare centers and family childcare homes, require that outdoor play areas be free of water hazards and potential sources of fecal contamination that could lead to transmission of enteric pathogens such as *Cryptosporidium* or *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) O157:H7.
- **Minnesota Department of Human Services Division of Licensing DHS Rule 3 for Child Care Centers does not allow wading pools for any age group.**

According to reports from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), each year several outbreaks of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections are identified in Minnesota in both childcare homes and centers. These outbreaks often cause disruption of parents' schedules and loss of income for the childcare provider because infected children need to be excluded from childcare until they are no longer carrying the bacteria, which can take as long as one to two months. Several other disease-causing agents, including *Giardia*, *Cryptosporidium*, and *Shigella*, are also efficiently transmitted in wading pools. All of these agents can cause severe illness in children and are common in Minnesota.

Unlike swimming pools that are treated to prevent disease transmission, wading pools are typically filled with tap water and may or may not be emptied and disinfected on a daily basis. Thus, many enteric pathogens (germs from the stool) can be easily spread by contaminated wading pool water that children may accidentally swallow while playing in the pool. Spread of these infections can occur even under the care of the most diligent and thoughtful childcare providers, since these infections can be spread even when the child only has mild symptoms. For these reasons, wading pools are not appropriate for childcare settings with infants and toddlers who are still in diapers.

In addition, children who are ill with vomiting or diarrhea should not play in any wading pool, pool, or spa. A child known to be infected with enteric pathogens such as *Cryptosporidium* or *E. coli* O157:H7 should not use any pools (see disease-specific fact sheets in Section 6). For some diseases, children should be kept out of pools for a specified time period even after the diarrhea has stopped.

In addition, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission warns that young children can drown in small amounts of water, as little as two inches deep. Submersion incidents involving children usually happen in familiar surroundings and can happen quickly (even in the time it takes to answer the phone). In a comprehensive study of drowning and submersion incidents involving children under five years old, 77% of the victims had been missing from sight for five minutes or less. The Commission notes that toddlers, in particular, often do something unexpected because their capabilities change daily. Child drowning is a silent death, since there is no splashing to alert anyone that the child is in trouble.

Alternatives to wading pools include sprinklers, hoses, or small individual water buckets. All provide water play opportunities that are not potential hazards for drowning or disease transmission.

