

Safe Fun in the Kiddie Pool

By Barbara M. Soule, R.N. MPA, CIC, FSHEA

Kiddie pools can bring hours of delight to young children on a hot summer day. But unlike larger pools, small plastic and inflatable kiddie pools are normally not equipped with water filters or treated with chemicals that remove germs and balance pH. Add to this the fact that hygiene is not a strong suit of the kiddie pool set, and a few helpful tips are in order for safe fun in the kiddie pool:



Fill the pool with fresh water before each use: Without the benefit of chemical treatment, kiddie pools must be refilled with fresh tap water before each use. When my children were small, I would fill the pool with water early in the morning and let it warm up for a few hours before letting the children go in. Naturally, adult supervision is needed around the water-filled pool.

A Word to the Wise: If you plan to leave the end of a garden hose submerged in the pool, remember that not all states require backflow preventers on hoses. Without a backflow preventer, it is possible that tainted pool water will flow back into the drinking water system when the hose is turned off.

- ✓ *Bathe children before they enter the pool:* This may sound counterintuitive, but without bathing children first, the risk of their contaminating the pool with pathogens rises. Without getting too graphic, the diaper and underpants area are the source of most of the pathogens that can make kids sick. Change diapers as needed, and keep in mind that swim diapers or swim pants are not leak-proof. If your little swimmer is potty trained, build in some bathroom breaks to avoid “accidents.”
- ✓ *Sick children should not be in the pool with other children:* A child who is experiencing diarrhea or vomiting must not be allowed in the pool with other children. If a child becomes sick in the kiddie pool, a quick exit of everyone from the pool is in order. The pool must be emptied of water, cleaned and disinfected before being used again (see the next tip).
- ✓ *Clean and disinfect the kiddie pool after each use:* Drain or empty the pool after each use. Leaving the pool full overnight is unsafe, both because it is a potential drowning risk and a potential waterborne disease risk. (Did I mention there are no disinfectants in the water?) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [recommends](#) cleaning the pool after it has been used, and once dry, leaving it in the sun for at least four hours. The ultraviolet rays of the sun can be effective at destroying pathogens. Alternatively, if manufacturer’s directions agree, the kiddie

Do You Bathe Your Children Together?

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) website notes children from the same family or household who are often bathed together are unlikely to be at increased risk of spreading diarrheal illness to each other when using the same inflatable or plastic pool. Allowing larger numbers of children from different families to use these pools, however, is likely to increase the risk of spreading diarrheal illnesses.

pool interior can be cleaned and then disinfected with a simple chlorine bleach solution. For example, the [“How to Clean Stuff” website](#)¹ recommends using a solution of one part bleach to five parts water. Rinse the pool well after this treatment.

- ✓ *Don't drink the kiddie pool water:* Discourage children from drinking pool water from kiddie pools or from any pool, for that matter. After all, we know from a 2009 Water Quality & Health Council [survey](#) that approximately one in five adults admit to having peed in the pool--a habit that might have started in the kiddie pool. Distracting young children with a “sippy cup” of a favorite beverage may help, but don't be surprised if the beverage ends up poured over somebody's head!

Here's to a happy, healthy and safe fun in the kiddie pool.

Barbara M. Soule, R.N. MPA, CIC, FSHEA is an Infection Preventionist and a member of the Water Quality & Health Council.

¹ Although the [“How to Clean Stuff” website](#) recommends draining kiddie pools only once per week, I strongly recommend draining the pool immediately after use.