DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LICENSING DIVISON

# Swimming Pool Risks

## Family Child Care

**The use of swimming pools in home child care settings could facilitate the transmission of infections among children and cause serious disease, and also present risk of drowning and injury.**

In Minnesota, we are particularly concerned about the potential for the enhanced transmission of E. coli O157:H7. This bacteria is passed in stool and is readily transmitted among children when contaminated hands or toys are placed in the mouth or contaminated food or water are consumed. Pools can easily become contaminated with stool.

Infection with E. coli O157:H7 is the primary cause of hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), the most common cause of kidney failure in children in this country. This syndrome usually involves prolonged hospital stays and is fatal in up to 5% of cases. The Minnesota Department of Health maintains information on infectious diseases.

Each year several E. coli O157:H7 outbreaks are identified in Minnesota in both child care homes and centers. These outbreaks often cause a disruption of parents' schedules and income for the child care provider because infected children need to be excluded from child care until they are no longer carrying the bacteria, which can take as long as 1-2 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. The Minnesota Department of Health maintains information reported to them about laboratory-confirmed infectious diseases.

The transmission of these infections can occur even under the care of the most diligent and thoughtful child care providers as the infections can be spread even with mild symptoms. The Center for Disease Control has more information regarding safe swimming at
http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/rwi-basics.html

## Swimming pools present the risk of drowning or other submersion incidents.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) 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 5 years old, 77% of the victims had been missing from sight for 5 minutes or less.

The Commission notes that toddlers in particular often do something unexpected because their capabilities change daily, and that child drowning is a silent death; there is no splashing to alert anyone that the child is in trouble. The CPSC has more information at their website. If you would like to know more information about drowning prevention click here.

Primary factors in risk of drowning and near-drowning injury for children are access to pools and supervision. Pool bottoms with steep drop-offs can be a risk to non-swimmers who inadvertently get into deep water. Above-ground pools pose a different risk for drowning than below-ground pools because visibility may be blocked by pool walls, increasing the likelihood of a delay in discovering unsupervised pool use, or pool users in trouble. Also, pool drains can trap hair if not properly shielded. Many drownings have occurred because of hair entrapment. Fencing may be the biggest factor, however, in controlling unsupervised access to the pool.