

Study: Child dies in portable pool every 5 days

By Associated Press, Staff writer Chad Gillis contributed to this report.

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — A child dies in a portable pool every five days during warm-weather months, according to the first U.S. study on child drownings in such pools, a statistic that the study's senior author says demonstrates the need for consumer education and affordable protection devices.

The research, which was published Monday in the journal *Pediatrics*, shows 209 deaths and 35 near-drownings of children under 12 from 2001 through 2009. Most of the children, 94 percent, were under 5, and 81 percent of the accidents happened during summer months.

"The anecdotal evidence was suggesting that because portable pools are readily available in many convenience stores and malls, and they're relatively cheap, parents would pick them up, take them home, quickly assemble them, and all this would be done without a lot of forethought about the safety aspects," said senior author, Dr. Gary A. Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus.

The study focused on portable pools, from small wading pools less than 18 inches deep to inflatable pools and other soft-sided pools that can reach depths of 4 feet. It was conducted by researchers at Nationwide hospital and Independent Safety Consulting in Rockville, Md. They say the findings are comparable to drownings related to in-ground pools.

Many safety methods used for permanent pools, such as fencing, pool alarms, safety covers and removable or lockable ladders, are too expensive or not available for families who purchase portable pools, said Smith, who also is a pediatrics professor at the Ohio State University College of Medicine.

The Association of Pool & Spa Professionals supports "layers of protection," and the study underscores the importance of active, undistracted adult supervision, said Carvin DiGiovanni a senior director at the Alexandria, Va.-based association.

"The primary layer of protection is constant adult supervision supplemented by barriers, alarms and other related devices," he said. "We encourage homeowners to purchase the additional layer of protection that works for them knowing that they would be more likely to use it."

Locally, both Lee and Collier health department officials recommend all pool owners focus on three things: making children safer around water, making the pool as safe as possible with various barriers and quality adult supervision.

Lee County recorded six drowning deaths for children ages 1 and 5 in 2009 the most recent numbers available, compared to three in Collier.

One key to preventing drowning deaths is proper rescue. Diane Holmes with the Lee County Health Department said swimmers near drowning can be dangerous.

“Don’t get into the water with a panicked swimmer,” Holmes said. “If they’re conscious, they can drown the rescuer.”

Smith said drownings overall represent the second-leading cause of injury deaths among young children and are different from other childhood accidents because there’s no second chance.

“I tell parents that drowning is quick, it’s silent and it’s final,” he said.