

Potential Dangers by the Pool

(Newark, NJ) – Sunburn, unsafe swimming and sweltering temperatures are not the only concerns when heading to the pool on a bright summer day. Exposure to pool chemicals pose potentially serious health concerns. Poison Center experts often see an uptick in calls involving both children and adults during the swimming season.

CASE: Caller in his 30's developed coughing and shortness of breath after routine pool maintenance. Symptoms developed after opening pool chemical containers in his shed, which had poor ventilation.

CASE: Caller stated siblings younger than 10 years old were playing out in their backyard. A pool chemical container was left on the patio, in the sun with the lid unsecured. Children developed breathing problems after opening the lid and inhaling the chemical's fumes.

"Pool safety includes safe handling of pool chemicals," says Diane Calello, MD, NJ Poison Control Center Executive and Medical Director, Rutgers NJ Medical School's Department of Emergency Medicine. "Some pool and hot tub chemicals, which are necessary to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria in the water, can be dangerous and must be used and stored properly. For example, chlorine can cause eye irritation, breathing problems and lung injury if used in high concentrations or in poorly ventilated enclosed spaces."

The NJ Poison Control Center offers the following tips for the safe handling and storage of swimming pool and hot tub chemicals:

- Store chemicals in a lockable area out of sight and reach of children and pets. Keep them in a cool, dry, well-ventilated area out of the sun.
- Read and follow the safety directions on the product's label during each use. Always keep chlorine and other chemicals in their original containers to avoid confusion and possible accidental ingestion.
- Never mix chemicals together; the combination could create a toxic gas which could have life-threatening effects. This risk also applies to mixing chemicals with ammonia.
- Chlorine should never be ingested. Avoid shaking chlorine containers to minimize dust, fumes and splashes. Avoid touching chlorine with bare hands.
- Open all chemicals in well-ventilated areas, preferably outdoors. Keep chlorine away from other combustible substances.
- When transporting chemicals, separate incompatible chemicals and tightly secure them to prevent spills.
- Be aware that swimming in chlorinated water can have the following effects: skin irritation that can trigger rashes; burning, itchy eyes; and can trigger or aggravate bronchial problems including asthma.
- Save the Poison Help line, 1-800-222-1222, in your phone for questions, concerns and emergencies.

Poison Control Centers are not only a great resource in the event of an emergency, but experts are also available to answer any questions or concerns you may have, 24/7. Save the Poison Help line, 1-800-222-1222, in your phone today so you're prepared for what may happen tomorrow.