

Indoor Pools May Pose Danger for Young Lungs

By ERIC NAGOURNEY Could indoor pools be contributing to the increase in asthma among children?

The idea has been around for a while, but new research that compared the number of pools in different parts of Europe with the incidence of the disease has found that this may well be the case. Writing in the current journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, the researchers said that the more indoor pools per capita there were, the greater the prevalence of childhood asthma and wheezing. The researchers, from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, noted that as asthma and allergies have become more common in the developed world over the last 30 years, some people have suggested that increased exposure to chlorination byproducts in the air at indoor pools may play a role. Chlorine products are regularly used in pools to fight disease. But they give off strong gases — giving pools their distinctive smell — when the water is disturbed or when the chlorine destroys organic matter from swimmers. “The discovery that this chlorine-laden atmosphere can be deleterious to the lungs of young children exercising in it is not surprising,” the researchers wrote. The study suggested that pools might need to be better ventilated. For the study, the researchers looked at the incidence of asthma, allergies and eczema among almost 190,000 children in 21 countries. They then looked at the number of pools per 100,000 residents, a figure that varied considerably by region. Western Europe, for example, has many more pools than Eastern Europe. The strongest association was found between indoor pools and asthma. It remained, the researchers said, even after other factors like climate and altitude were taken into account.