

Press Release

Evidence of a relationship between swimming babies and infections

Neuherberg, 4 October. Scientists of the GSF – National Research Center for Environment and Health (Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres) found indications for an association between attendance of swimming pools in the first year of life and the frequency of infections. Diarrhoea and otitis media during the first year of life are especially noteworthy. No increased risks were found for atopic diseases during the first six years.

“In this way, the study shows that allowing babies to swim is possibly not as harmless with regard to infections as has been presumed till now,” underlines Dr. Joachim Heinrich. He leads the research unit environmental epidemiology at the GSF Institute for Epidemiology.

Prof. Dr. Dr. H. Erich Wichmann, Director of the GSF Institute of Epidemiology, adds: “This is a first indication. Nevertheless, it requires other evidence to be able to achieve consequential results whether the water quality in German swimming-pools protects sufficiently against infections in infants, and, in particular, against gastro-intestinal infections.”

Within the scope of the LISA study, a cohort study conducted from birth, 2,191 children were re-examined at age 6. Furthermore, the data of swimming-pool attendances during infancy were collated, while further data on children's health and life-style factors was collected by parental interviews.

Those babies that had not taken part in swimming as infants showed in the first year of life a much lower infection rate, especially with diarrhoea *. However, no unequivocal connection could be produced between infant or frequent swimming-pool attendances and atopic diseases up to the age of six years. Indeed, an extensive control group of children who had not attended swimming-pools during the first six years is so far missing, but would be essential to draw conclusions about the long-term health impact of early swimming pool attendance.

Additional Information

***Statistical Data:** Diarrhoea: OR 0.68 CI 95% 0.54-0.85; otitis of the middle ear: OR 0.81 CI 95% 0.62-1.05; respiratory diseases: OR 0.85 CI 95% 0.67-1.09;
OR: Odds Ratio; CI: Confidence Interval.

Yvonne Schoefer, Anne Zutavern, Inken Brockow, Torsten Schäfer, Ursula Krämer, Beate Schaaf, Olf Herbarth, Andrea von Berg, H.-Erich Wichmann, Joachim Heinrich (for the LISA-research group): “Health risks of early swimming pool attendance.” International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health (2007) in press, online.

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