

Bathtub Accidents Injure 43,000 U.S. Kids Each Year

Manufacturers need to make tubs more slip-resistant, experts say

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MONDAY, July 13 (HealthDay News) -- More than 43,000 children are injured in slips and falls in bathtubs each year in the United States, researchers report.

Earlier studies of bathtub injuries concentrated on burns from hot water and drowning and near-drowning. This is the first study that looked at injuries caused by slips and falls, according to the report published in the July 13 online edition of *Pediatrics*.

"What caught our attention was the frequency of the slips and falls," said lead researcher Dr. Gary A. Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at the Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

There are about 120 kids a day injured by slips and falls in bathtubs and showers, and that number is constant over the 18 years the researchers looked at, Smith said. "That is really telling me that we have a problem that needs to be addressed," he noted.

There are things that can be done to prevent these injuries, Smith said. "Parents need to use slip-resistant mats in and outside of bathtubs to prevent slips and falls," he said.

But, Smith also wants manufacturers to make safer tubs and showers. "Manufacturers need to go back and look at the current standard for slip resistance and strengthen that criteria," he said.

For the study, Smith's team used data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission from 1990 to 2007. The researchers looked at some 791,200 bathtub- and shower-related injuries in children aged 18 and younger treated in emergency departments.

The study found that the greatest number of injuries were in children aged 2 years. In all, children aged 4 and younger accounted for 54.3 percent of the injuries. Most injuries (71.3 percent) happened in the bathtub, and 97.1 percent happened at home, the researchers noted.

The most common injuries were cuts, which accounted for 59.5 percent of the injuries. Fall, slips and trips were the most common reason for injuries, accounting for 81 percent of all injuries, according to the report.

Most injuries were to the face (48 percent), followed by the head and neck (15 percent). Some 2.8 percent of the children were admitted to the hospital, transferred to another hospital, or held for observation, Smith's team noted.

Dr. David L. Katz, director of the Prevention Research Center at Yale University School of Medicine, said it's "alarming that more than 40,000 children are injured badly enough each year in bath and shower tumbles to warrant a trip to the emergency room."

If these injuries were unavoidable, that would be one thing, Katz said. "But they are extremely, if not completely, preventable, and by simple means," Katz noted.

"Bath and shower surfaces can be engineered to provide more friction, and surfaces in tubs and showers can be designed to pose less menace should a fall occur," he said.

For now, parents are forewarned that tub and shower tumbles in young children are a common cause of injury, Katz said. "So the first line of defense is parental vigilance. But the more definitive response is to re-engineer tubs and showers," he said.

More information

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