



Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention

Serving Massachusetts and Rhode Island



Splish, Splash, Safety!

By Jill Griffin, MA/RI Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention

Summer brings school vacation, warm weather and lots of outdoor activities. A favorite summer pastime is swimming and playing in the swimming pool. In order to keep our pools clean and healthy, we have to use a variety of chemicals to treat the water. While these chemicals keep our water clear, they can also be very dangerous if used incorrectly. In addition to the toxic health effects of exposure to chlorinated chemicals and strong acids used to treat pool and spa water, explosions can occur if certain chemicals are mixed together. Be sure to always follow the manufacturer's instructions for the use and storage of these chemicals.

According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), most health-related incidents associated with chlorine happen when it is inhaled. Chlorine's strong smell and irritant properties usually provide a good warning that toxic gases are in the air. However, prolonged, low-level exposures, such as those that occur in the workplace, can lead to increased tolerance to chlorine's irritant effects, making it difficult to smell the gas. Chlorine is heavier than air and may cause a person to stop breathing if they are in an enclosed or low-lying area. Children are at higher risk for poisoning because of their size and height. Follow poison safety precautions with these chemicals and all other household products.

In general, here are some tips for pool chemical use and storage:

Usage

- Read, and follow, the labels and directions carefully before you open or use the product.
- Step outside of the pool house before opening chemical containers.
- Hands must be clean and dry. Always wash hands before and after handling chemicals and promptly wash off any chemicals that get on your skin.
- Never use metallic utensils - use plastic, glass, china or enamelware utensils and buckets only and be sure they are clean and dry.
- Add chemicals to water. Never add water to chemicals.
- Always add the chemicals directly to the pool water, either in a suitable feeder or diluted and poured into the water.
- Never add chemicals to the pool water while swimmers are using the pool.
- Never mix chemicals together. Use a clean scoop for each chemical, and never combine material from "old" and "new" containers.
- Wash out empty disinfectant containers before disposing to eliminate danger of fire, explosion or poisoning and do not reuse the container.
- Carefully clean up any spilled chemicals with large amounts of water.
- Do not inhale dust or fumes from any pool chemicals. If necessary use protective devices for breathing, skin and eye protection.
- Use a reliable test kit to test pool water. Add the necessary chemicals according to test results and the manufacturer's instructions.
- If you have any questions regarding safe handling, storage or use of pool chemicals, contact the manufacturer.

Storage

- Chemical reagents for test kits should be replaced each year.
- Do not stack different chemical on top of one another.
- Physically separate all different forms of chemicals, liquid from dry.
- Store your pool chemicals in a clean, cool, dry, well-ventilated area in the original container with tight lids.
- Keep acids away from other chemicals.
- Do not store your pool chemicals where other flammable items may mix with them. For example, a mixture of pool chemicals and fertilizer can cause a fire or explosion.

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