



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Baby bath seats are not safety devices warns BC Children's Hospital

Vancouver, B.C. –Three recent drowning and near-drowning incidents in Manitoba and B.C., involving babies left unattended in bath seats, has safety experts at Children's Hospital issuing a warning.

Bath seats and rings are plastic, chair-like supports intended to assist parents in bathing their infants. Most models attach to tub surfaces using suction cups. "There is a misconception among parents that these are safety devices," said Anne Williams, Manager of the Safety Station childproofing centre at BC Children's.

Millions of families use bath seats and rings without incident; however, mounting evidence shows that parents whose babies drowned in one of these devices mistakenly believed it would protect their children from harm when briefly left unattended. One U.S. study found that families using baby bath seats tended to fill their tubs with more water than those who did not (18 cm vs. 11 cm, or 7 in. vs. 4.5 in.), and were more likely to leave their babies unsupervised willfully rather than impulsively (i.e. leaving to attend to household chores vs. answer the telephone or doorbell).

"These products give a false sense of security in that they appear to keep babies upright and out of the water, when in fact the opposite is true," said Williams. "Bath seats are in no way a substitute for staying with your baby at all times."

Not all injuries happen in the absence of supervision. In October 2003, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) voted to propose mandatory safety standards for all baby bath seats and rings due to the failure of voluntary standards to protect infants. In more than half of submersion and entrapment incidents (fatal and non-fatal) leading up to the proposed rulemaking, a parent or caregiver was present. There are currently no safety standards for these products in Canada, and it is not known when CPSC standards will come into effect.

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Common problems with baby bath seats:

1. Leg openings large enough to allow babies' torsos to 'submarine' and become trapped underwater.
2. Suction cups that are ineffective on treated tub surfaces, resulting in instability and tip-overs.
3. Age guidelines that do not account for some babies' abilities to pull themselves up sooner than expected. The median age for drowning and near-drowning in a baby bath seat or ring is eight months.

To protect your baby, BC Children's offers these warnings:

1. NEVER leave a baby alone in the bath with or without a bath seat, even in the presence of an older child.
2. Read the instructions.
3. Keep one hand on your baby at all times.
4. Fill your tub with only enough water for baby to bathe, splash and play (between 2.5 and 5 cm or one to two inches of water).
5. Stop using the product as soon as your baby can pull themselves up.

The Safety Station is a province-wide program offering free advice to parents on childproofing their homes. The program offers a telephone advisory service, comprehensive website and online store with proceeds going to BC Children's Hospital's injury prevention program. For more information visit www.cw.bc.ca/safetystation or call toll-free across Canada 1-888-331-8100.

BC Children's Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, provides expert care for the province's most seriously ill or injured children, including newborns and adolescents. For more information please visit www.cw.bc.ca.

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information please visit www.phsa.ca.

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