

Possible link between baby swimming and breathing problems in children

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Children with mothers who have allergies or asthma have an increased risk of wheezing in the chest if they take part in baby swimming before 6 months of age. This is shown in a new study using data from the Norwegian Mother and Child Study (MoBa) at the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH).

The results come from a study of 30 000 participants from MoBa. Approximately 25 percent of these children took part in baby swimming from 0-6 months of age.

Most children who take part in baby swimming show no increased incidence of lower respiratory tract infections, ear inflammation (otitis media) or tightness and wheezing in the chest. Between 6-18 months the incidence of lower respiratory tract infections and otitis media were 13 percent and 30 percent respectively, whilst the proportion of children who experienced tightness or wheezing in the chest was 40 percent.

Among children of mothers with asthma and allergy, 44 percent of those who did not go swimming had tightness or wheezing in the chest. This was compared to the 47 percent of children who swam and experienced tightness and wheezing who had mothers with asthma and allergies.

- The difference is not large but it indicates a tendency to respiratory problems, says Wenche Nystad, primary author and Department Director at the NIPH's Division of Epidemiology.

Earlier studies indicated that there can be a link between baby swimming and airway infections in children. It has been suggested that indoor environmental factors (airway irritants) such as volatile chlorination products for indoor swimming pools can affect lung epithelium and contribute to the development of respiratory illnesses like asthma among children.

The connection between respiratory problems and baby swimming was suggested by a paediatrician who asked whether children with increased risk of asthma, who took part in baby swimming, had a greater tendency to develop respiratory diseases. Earlier studies indicated a connection but the results were uncertain. Therefore we want to carry out a more thorough study, says Nystad.

If mother and baby are healthy, the study shows that there is no increased risk of otitis media or respiratory problems with baby swimming before six months of age.

Source: Norwegian Institute of Public Health

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