

Remote pools boost aboriginal child health

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A new study has found that swimming pools in remote Aboriginal communities can dramatically reduce rates of skin, ear and chest infections.

Researchers from Perth's Telethon Institute for Child Health Research examined seven years of clinical records at two communities, Jigalong and Mugarinya, in Western Australia's Pilbara region.

The results have just been published in the latest edition of the Medical Journal of Australia.

Report co-author Dr Desiree Silva said the research team had access to the records of 131 children in Jigalong and 128 children in Mugarinya.

Dr Silva said infections were more than halved in both communities.

"After the pools had been installed, clinic attendance for skin infections dropped by 68% in Jigalong and by up to 77% in Mugarinya," Dr Silva said.

"In Jigalong, prescriptions for antibiotics fell by 45%, clinic attendance for middle-ear infections dropped by 61% and attendance for chest infections was halved."

Skin infections are of major concern because they can lead to chronic heart or kidney disease later in life. These diseases are very common in Aboriginal communities. Middle ear infections (otitis media) can lead to

hearing loss that can affect schooling and hence opportunities later in life. Chest infections are the most common infection for which young Aboriginal children are admitted to hospital.

“What this research does is provide the evidence that pools can have significant health benefits in remote communities,” Dr Silva said.

“Aboriginal children suffer very high rates of infections compared with the rest of the community. These infections can be life threatening or lead to long-term health issues such as kidney failure.

“In addition to these positive health outcomes, the children learn to swim safely and the community receives a social hub as well as employment opportunities.”

Dr Silva said not only have the children benefited by few visits to the clinic for infections, but the swimming pools in communities had also reduced the workload in the local clinics and cut down costs of treatment with antibiotics.

“If antibiotics are prescribed less frequently then there is a greater chance of antibiotics being effective when needed and less chance of bacteria becoming resistant to standard antibiotics,” she said.

Source: Research Australia

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