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Media alert - Having a backyard pool is a big responsibility

Urgent Alert: Preventing Home Pool Drownings

MONTREAL, Aug. 10 /CNW Telbec/ - Regardless of age or skill level no one is drown-proof. The Montreal Children's Hospital Trauma Centre of the MUHC warns parents about the dangers of young children drowning in above-ground or in-ground backyard swimming pools. This warning is prompted by the second case in the past week of a child who was hospitalized at the Trauma Centre following a near-drowning event. The toddler was hospitalized last week and was cared for by MCH Trauma specialists. She has since recovered well and has been discharged home. Earlier in the same week another toddler was not as fortunate and succumbed to his injuries after drowning in an above ground pool.

According to MCH Trauma Director, Debbie Friedman, drowning is a leading cause of death in Canada for children aged 1 to 4 years; 50% of these deaths occur in Quebec. Friedman points out that at this age children are curious, they do not recognize the potential for danger, and they are impulsive. She notes that, according to The Canadian Red Cross, each year in Canada approximately 60 children aged 14 and under drown, while another 140 are hospitalized for near-drownings.

According to a 2006 Safekids Canada report, nearly 50% of drowning deaths occur around swimming pools, many in private homes with un-fenced or inadequately fenced swimming pools.

Friedman strongly supports the Quebec government's Residential Swimming Pool Safety Bill unveiled this past July, which is expected to go to the National Assembly in the fall of 2009. This Bill calls for specific standards, including mandatory fencing around newly installed pools. However, she urges municipalities to go further and pass and enforce by-laws that would require homeowners to ensure that all backyard swimming pools--not only newly installed ones--are surrounded by 4-sided fencing that is a minimum of 4 feet in height, that has no opening below the fence, and that has automatic locking gates. She emphasizes the importance of having NO direct access to the pool from the house or patio.

The fact that the law will only be in effect by next summer leaves trauma experts concerned about this summer. Carlo Galli, Trauma Coordinator of the Injury Prevention Program, reminds parents and caregivers of the importance of vigilant supervision since it takes no time for a young child to drown in as little as 5 centimetres of water.

A few other important recommendations to ensure safety around pools for young children include:- Swimming pool areas should be well supervised with everyone keeping their eyes on the water.

- Automatic locking gates should not only be installed but checked regularly to ensure proper functioning.
- Children under 5 years of age should wear properly fitted personal floatation devices. This also applies to older children who are do not know how to swim.
- In keeping with the coroner's recommendations of August 2008, it is strongly recommended that children and teens take swimming lessons
- Always remember to empty kiddie pools when not in use.
- Never leave young children unattended near hot tubs
- Knowledge of lifesaving techniques is an asset. Ms. Friedman concludes that these tragic events are devastating and strongly encourages that the above recommendations be followed closely so that they can be prevented.

For more information on trauma and injury prevention check out the new MCH Traumawebsite at www.thechildren.com/trauma

The Montreal Children's Hospital is the pediatric teaching hospital of the McGill University Health Centre. This institution is a leader in the care and treatment of sick infants, children, and adolescents from across Quebec. The Montreal Children's Hospital provides a high level and broad scope of health care services, and provides ultra-specialized care in many fields including: cardiology and cardiac surgery; neurology and neurosurgery, traumatology; genetic research; psychiatry and child development and musculoskeletal conditions, including orthopedics and rheumatology. Fully bilingual and multicultural, the institution respectfully serves an increasingly diverse community in more than 50 languages.

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The Montreal Children's Hospital

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