NOW that the dog days of summer are in full swing, many children and adults alike look to cool off in a nearby pool to beat the heat. Before they dive in, swimmers should be aware that excessive exposure to chlorinated water and pool-related oral injuries might hurt their teeth, as well as their summer fun, according to the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS).

Excessive exposure of the tooth enamel to chlorine, a chemical added to disinfect pools, may cause brownish discolorations, primarily on the front teeth. These discolorations are due to chemical additives in the chlorine, such as antimicrobials, which give the water a higher pH than saliva, causing salivary proteins to break down quickly and form organic deposits on the swimmer's teeth, according to the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD). Swimmers—especially those who are in the pool for more than six hours a week—can avoid this staining by brushing their teeth immediately after swimming. Swimmers can also have regular cleanings and whiten their teeth to keep the staining under control. But this isn't just a summertime concern. Since chlorine is added to indoor pools, such as those found at hotels and YMCAs, year-round swimmers will want to adopt these post-swimming oral care habits to keep their pearly whites sparkling.

While it sure is fun to frolic poolside on a hot summer day, dental and mouth injuries as a result of accidents near the pool are all too common. Those "No Running" and "No Diving" signs posted on the fence at your local pool may seem like a killjoy, but they're there for good reason, because swimming pool accidents are the number one cause of dental emergencies during the summer, according to the AGD. The hard cement and ceramic surfaces around the pool ledge are oftentimes wet and slippery, and one can easily lose his or her footing and crash facefirst into the concrete or a chair, damaging teeth in the process.

Safet

for Summer Swimmers

Swimmers (and sunbathers) should be careful not to run near the pool, to wear appropriate footwear to avoid slipping on wet surfaces, and to be very cautious when jumping and diving. It's also important to look before you leap, so know where you are before diving in. Many accidents occur when swimmers misjudge dives into too-shallow water and hit the pool bottom, or pull up too close to the edge of the pool, hitting their face and/or loosening their front teeth.

Whether swimming or playing in or around the pool, everyone should be aware of their surroundings. Exercising caution around pools this summer (and year-round) is a must for avoiding any type of injury. The MDS wants you to have fun this summer, but we also want you to have a healthy, pain-free mouth. •

For more information on your oral health, contact the Massachusetts Dental Society at (800) 342-8747 or visit www.massdental.org.

