Kids at Risk in Hot 'Bounce Houses'? No, So Bounce the Study

By Erik Lief — August 3, 2016

Seeking entry into the annals of *Perceived Threats That Makes Parenting Needlessly More Frightening*, we now have a new "study" claiming that kids playing within enclosed, inflatable, trampoline-like enclosures in warmer climates are potentially at risk of dying from heat stroke.

Yes, the researchers say, bounding around in so-called Bounce Houses could kill your kid.

Ok, let's take a deep breath and jump into this topic starting with a statement from one of the study's co-authors: "This research is a preliminary look at something that no one had really examined in the published literature," said Marshall Sheppard, University of Georgia’s Athletic Association Distinguished Professor of Geography and Atmospheric Sciences.

I suspect there's a strong reason no research team has tackled this issue before: It's all completely hot-air. But fine, let's look at the details of the study, published in the *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* [1], (where, of course, most of your important health reports are typically found).

In the paper entitled "Do Inflatable Bounce Houses Pose Heat-Related Hazards to Children?" the authors wrote that, "Results show that maximum air temperatures in the bounce house can reach up to 3.7°C (6.7°F) greater than ambient conditions and peak heat index values may exceed outdoor conditions by 4.5°C (8.1°F). When considered in the context of the National Weather Service heat index safety categories, the bounce house reached the 'danger' level in over half of the observations compared with only 7% of observations for ambient conditions."

"Heat illnesses like heat stroke can be deadly and occur in children participating in sports, left alone in parked cars, and as our study shows, potentially when playing in bounce houses," said
Andrew Grundstein, UGA professor of geography and co-author on the study.

Now, do these inflatable structures get hotter than simply being outdoors? Of course they do. But young kids are not spending hours upon interrupted hours inside them, working up an incredible sweat. (And if they are, then that's the problem, not the bounce houses themselves.) Conversely, these devices are typically used for short bursts, after which time kids can exit and readily be hydrated (or rehydrated) -- by parents or care givers paying attention.

This "microclimate" study also apparently seeks to share the spotlight with another scenario far more fear-inducing, one involving toddlers or babies, who become trapped in overheated parked cars and subsequently suffer heat stroke. That's an entirely different situation, but one where being distracted and not paying attention is the culprit, not the car itself.

"Children are more sensitive to heat than adults and parents need to carefully watch their children for signs of overheating when active on hot and humid days," added Grunstein, referring to Bounce House activity. "Signs there is a problem may include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, and flushed, moist skin."

Moist skin? You mean, sweating? Yes, kids will sweat on hot days when they are exerting themselves. But if parents simply monitor their kids and not go off for two-hour lunch breaks, they can step in and cool them down when needed.

And then there's this statistic [2], from a write-up in Science Codex: "The findings are based on experiments with a bounce house on the UGA campus in July 2015, with weather conditions representative of a typical summer day in the area."

Let's say that again: The findings were gathered by observing a single play area, in the summer, in Athens, Georgia, on a 92-degree day. One Bounce House. That's your study?

"I knew it was a problem when I watched my child in one on a particularly hot day and our early findings confirmed my suspicions," added Sheppard. "Hopefully it makes parents more aware of something they probably overlooked."

Once again, as we've always said, if you do anything to excess, you may endanger your health. So the obvious message is that if you have a Bounce-House kid in your midst and it's a hot summer day, then don't let the house bouncing go on too long without a water break. Let the kids have fun, take breaks along the way, and stop scaring parents that danger exists where it absolutely does not.