

Healthy and Safe Swimming Week - Talking Points

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General recreational water messaging:

- Americans swim hundreds of millions of times each year in pools, oceans, lakes, rivers and hot tubs/spas.
- Swimming is the most popular recreational activity for children & teens (ages 7-17).
- Most people have a safe and healthy time enjoying the water, but illnesses and injuries can occur.

Health benefits of water-based activity:

- The benefits of water-based activity outweigh the risks of illness and injury.
- Water-based exercise can help people with chronic diseases, such as arthritis.
- Water-based exercise puts little or no stress on joints. In arthritis patients, it improves use of affected joints.
- Water-based exercise improves mental health—for example, it decreases depression and improves mood.
- Water-based exercise can benefit older adults by improving the quality of life and decreasing disability.
- Water-based exercise can improve or maintain the bone health of post-menopausal women.
- Swimming can be a great way to get and stay fit during pregnancy.
- Don't be bashful about poor swimming skills, take lessons! You can learn to swim at any age.
- Swimming is great exercise. It combines strength, stamina and technique.
- Swimming and alcohol are never a good combination. If you are going to swim, stay sober.

Recreational water illness (RWI):

- Recreational water illnesses (RWIs) are illnesses caused by germs and chemicals found in the water we swim in.
- Recreational water illnesses (RWIs) are caused by swallowing, breathing in mists of & having contact with contaminated water.
- Recreational water illnesses (RWIs) are often linked to swimming in pools, hot tubs/spas, water parks, and splash parks.
- Recreational water illnesses (RWIs) include gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic and wound infections.
- Swimmers might introduce poop into the water if they don't shower before getting in or have a diarrheal incident in the water.
- Poop from swimmers might contain germs. If the germs are swallowed by other swimmers, then they can be infected & become sick.
- From 2000-2014, about 500 outbreaks were linked to pools, hot/tubs/spas, and water playgrounds. Most were caused by *Cryptosporidium*, *Legionella*, or *Pseudomonas*.

Diarrhea:

- Diarrhea and fecal accidents in the pool is the most common cause of recreational water illness (RWI). Stay out of the water if you have diarrhea so others do not get sick!
- A single diarrheal incident can introduce millions of germs into the water. If people swallow the water, they could get sick.
- More than 1 in 5 American adults do not know that swimming while ill with diarrhea can potentially make other swimmers sick.
- Have diarrhea caused by *Cryptosporidium* (Crypto)? Stay out of the water while sick and the 2 weeks after symptoms stop.

Cryptosporidium (Crypto):

- *Cryptosporidium* (Crypto) is a germ that causes diarrhea lasting up to 2-3 weeks in healthy people.
- *Cryptosporidium* (Crypto) is the leading cause of U.S. outbreaks linked to the water we swim in.
- *Cryptosporidium* (Crypto) comes from poop from infected swimmers and can survive for up to 10 days in properly chlorinated pools.
- *Cryptosporidium* (Crypto) can lead to fatal weight loss and malnutrition in people with weakened immune systems.

Giardia:

- *Giardia* is a germ that causes diarrhea. Illness can last a few days or weeks or even longer.
- *Giardia* is one of the leading causes of U.S. outbreaks linked to the water we swim in.
- *Giardia* comes from poop from infected swimmers and can survive up to 45 minutes in a properly chlorinated pool.

Legionella:

- *Legionella* are bacteria that can live in the biofilm or slime in pools, spas, and showerheads. They can survive in water that is properly treated with chemicals such as chlorine.
- People over 50 with underlying health problems such as respiratory conditions like asthma, chronic conditions such as diabetes, as well as current or former smokers are at a higher risk of developing Legionellosis.
- Legionellosis and Pontiac fever are severe respiratory infections, caused by *Legionella*.

Vibrio:

- *Vibrio* bacteria can cause an infection in the intestines, skin, eyes, and ears, called vibriosis.
- Vibriosis may be a result of eating contaminated seafood, exposing broken skin or getting a skin wound while recreating in marine waters, or by getting water in eyes or ears while swimming.

- Minor skin injuries, which happen in or become exposed to marine waters can develop into major life-threatening illness. People with underlying health problems such as diabetes or liver disease may be more vulnerable to vibrio infections.

Naegleria fowleri “Brain-eating Ameba”:

- While infections from ameba are uncommon, *Naegleria fowleri* commonly live in warm freshwater lakes, rivers, and hot-springs.
- When *Naegleria* ameba forcefully goes up the nose, they can travel along nerves to the brain and cause a fatal illness called primary amebic meningoencephalitis (PAM).
- To limit the water that goes up the nose, wear nose plugs or hold your nose when swimming or doing water sports where you are likely to go underwater.

Swimmer’s ear:

- Swimmer’s ear is an infection that can occur if contaminated water stays in the ear canal for a long time.
- Swimmer’s ear is common in children and swimmers of all ages.
- Germs that can live in pools, such as (*Pseudomonas aeruginosa*), are the most common cause of swimmer’s ear.
- Swimmer’s ear results in an estimated 2.4 million health care visits/year & nearly ½ billion dollars in health care costs.
- Keep ears as dry as possible. Learn more about how to prevent swimmer’s ear:

Hot tub rash:

- Hot tub rash is an infection that can occur if contaminated water comes in contact with skin for a long time.
- Hot tub rash is caused by (*Pseudomonas aeruginosa*) and can affect people of all ages.
- Most hot tub rashes clear up in a few days without medical treatment.
- Lower your risk of hot tub rash! Remove your swimsuit and shower with soap after getting out of the water.

Illness Prevention:

- Do you think that disinfectants like chlorine kill germs instantly? Think again! Disinfectants kill most germs within minutes.
- Routine pool inspections, pool staff training, and good pool maintenance help protect swimmers from germs.
- Stay out of the water if you have diarrhea.
- Shower before you get in the water.
- Don’t pee or poop in the water.
- Use test strips to check chlorine and pH levels before getting into the water. Test strips can be purchased from pool supply stores as well as big-box stores and online retailers.
- For pools, CDC recommends a free chlorine level of 1–3 ppm and a pH level of 7.2–7.8.

- For hot tubs/spas, CDC recommends a free chlorine level of 2–4 ppm or bromine level of 4–6 ppm and a pH of 7.2–7.8.
- You don't drink the water you bathe in, why would you drink the water you swim in? Don't swallow the water!
- Every hour—everyone out! Take the kids on bathroom breaks, check diapers, reapply sunscreen, and remember to drink plenty of potable water (not pool water) to stay hydrated!

Keep pee, poop and body soil out of the pool:

- If swimmers pee in the pool, the pee mixes with the chlorine and uses it up. So there is less chlorine to kill germs.
- Have your eyes gotten red while swimming? It's not because of the chlorine. It's because of chlorine mixed with pee. Yuck!
- Strong chemical smell at the pool? The smell is probably chlorine mixed with pee and body soil. A "healthy" pool does not smell.
- Keep pools and people healthy by keeping the pee out!
- Shower with soap before swimming to remove dirt, lotions, sweat and oils that get stuck on skin. This keeps pool chemicals in the water to kill germs.

Messaging to parents and caregivers

Infants and babies:

- Breastfeeding in a pool is different from poolside or other settings because of risk of contact with the water, which contains germs.
- A baby's immune system is not as developed as older siblings are, so reducing the risk of exposure to germs is important to prevent infection.
- Babies don't control their body temperature as parents or older siblings do and even a few degrees can make a difference.
- Children do not understand the water we swim in is not for drinking. Swallowing large volumes of pool water can cause hyponatremia, a condition where cells in the body lose too much salt, resulting in seizures.

Diapers:

- Do you think swim diapers will prevent leaks into the pool? Not so fast! They don't stop germs from getting out.
- Swim diapers can delay—but not prevent—germs like *Shigella* from getting into pool water.
- All swimmers should stay out of the water when they have diarrhea, even if they are wearing swim diapers or swim pants.
- Swim diapers are not a substitute for bathroom breaks and diaper changes. Take breaks every hour and check diapers every ½ hour.

Drowning:

- From 2016-2020, 32% of drowning-related hospitalizations in Virginia were children aged 0-4 years.
- Almost 1 out of 2 (48%) hospitalizations among Virginia children aged 0-4 years from 2016-2020 were due to drowning in swimming pools.
- Every four days, one Virginia resident dies by drowning.
- Drowning kills more kids 1–4 years old than anything else except birth defects.
- Every day, about 10 people in the U.S. die from drowning. Two of the 10 are under the age of 15 years.
- In 2010, 726 kids under the age of 15 years died from drowning.
- Nearly 80% of people who die from drowning are male.
- Knowing how to swim is an important potentially life-saving skill worth learning. It's never too late to learn how to swim!
- Formal swimming lessons in children as young as 1 year old can reduce the risk of drowning.
- Always supervise children when they are in or around water.
- Wear a life jacket! Half of all boating deaths could be prevented with the use of life jackets.
- Don't use air-filled or foam toys, such as "water wings" or inner-tubes, instead use a life jacket that securely attaches to the body.
- A fence that completely separates the pool from house and yard can help protect young children from drowning.
- No matter how strong of a swimmer you are, never swim alone.

Other Water Venues

Beaches:

- Each year, 91 million people swim at U.S. freshwater and marine beaches.
- The water at the beach looks clean, but is it? Water may contain germs you can't see.
- Germs in water can cause minor illnesses (sore throats, diarrhea) or more serious illnesses that last longer than vacation!
- Avoid swimming for three days after a heavy rain. Germs can come from overflowing sewage, polluted storm water & runoff from land.
- Don't swim near storm drains (pipes that drain polluted water from streets) along the beach.
- Stay away from trash & oil slicks in the water. They might mean germs washed into the water, too.
- If you think your beach water has germs or pollution, contact your local health department or environmental department (DEQ).

Natural Waters:

- Pools and spas aren't the only places we swim or play in the water! Swim healthy in splash parks, lakes, rivers, and the ocean.

- Natural waters such as rivers, lakes, and oceans contain germs and contaminants, which can cause illness. Never drink untreated water, and don't swim if skin has cuts or open wounds.
- Don't dive or jump in unfamiliar waters. The water could be shallower than you expect, or you could hit an underwater rock or snag.
- Some algae can produce toxins that can make you sick. If you see a green film on the water, don't go in, and keep pets out as well.
- After swimming in natural waters, take a shower or bathe to wash off germs and contaminants.

Interactive Fountains (Splash Pads):

- Interactive fountains are also known as splash parks, splash pads, and spray parks. Water is typically recycled and can contain germs.
- Splash pad jets can rinse germs found in poop off of bottoms. Don't allow children to sit or stand on jets.
- Don't swallow splash pad water. Did you know that it can take chlorine minutes and even days to kill germs in splash pad water? Swallowing water with germs can cause diarrhea or vomiting.
- Stay out of splash pads if you are sick with diarrhea.
- Chlorine doesn't kill germs instantly. It may take hours to even days for splash pad water to thoroughly be disinfected once it has been contaminated.
- Check diapers and take bathroom breaks every hour at splash pads. When pee and poop mix with the water, they use up chlorine needed to kill germs.