



NEWS

R E L E A S E

Illinois Department of Public Health

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Summer Swimming Season – Avoiding Sickness

National Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week – May 24 - 20, 2010

SPRINGFIELD – As swimming pools, water parks and beaches prepare to open this upcoming Memorial Day weekend, Dr. Damon T. Arnold, director of the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), is encouraging people to learn how to protect themselves from getting sick while swimming. The themes for this year’s National Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week are pool inspections and the Triple A’s of healthy swimming; Awareness, Action and Advocacy.

“Going to swimming pools and water parks are great summer activities and good exercise, but they can also lead to illness if you’re not careful,” Dr. Arnold said. Knowing what hazards to look for at a pool or water park, and what steps you can take will help ensure a healthy and safe swimming experience.”

The goal of National Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week is to highlight the simple steps swimmers and pool operators can take to avoid illness,

Although pool inspectors check to make sure chemical levels are right and pool is operating properly, they can’t be at every pool every day. To help ensure a healthy swimming experience every time, we encourage swimmers to follow the Triple A’s of Healthy Swimming: Awareness, Action, and Advocacy.

- **Awareness** - Learn how to protect yourself and others from recreational water illnesses (RWIs) by visiting <http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/swimmingpools.htm> and follow the healthy swimming steps (listed below).
- **Action** - Ask the pool operator about chlorine and pH levels, and request information on the latest pool inspection score.
- **Advocacy** - Encourage pool operators to take steps shown to kill the germs that cause RWIs and educate other swimmers about RWIs to promote healthy swimming.

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The best way to prevent RWIs is to keep germs out of the pool in the first place. Follow these healthy swimming steps:

For all swimmers

- Don't swim when you have diarrhea.
- Don't swallow pool water.
- Practice good hygiene. Shower with soap before swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Germs on your body end up in the water.

For Parents of Young Children

- Take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often. All children who are not toilet-trained should wear tightly fitting rubber or plastic pants.
- Change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area and not at poolside.
- Wash your children thoroughly (especially the rear end) with soap and water before they go swimming.

Recreational water illnesses can be caused by germs like Crypto (short for Cryptosporidium), Giardia, E. coli 0157:H7, and Shigella, and are spread by accidentally swallowing water that has been contaminated with fecal matter. You share the water with everyone in the pool. If someone with diarrhea contaminates the water, swallowing the water can make you sick. Most germs are killed by chlorine, but some germs, like Crypto, are resistant to chlorine and can live in pools for days. That is why even the best maintained pools can spread illnesses.

Illness can also be caused by an improper chemical balance in pools, water parks and spas and can be identified by burning eyes, nose and lungs. The following are things you can look for to prevent illness.

- Clean and clear pool water; you should be able to clearly see any painted stripes and the bottom of the pool.
- Smooth pool sides; tiles should not be sticky or slippery.
- No odor; a well-chlorinated pool has little odor. A strong chemical smell indicates a maintenance problem.
- Pool equipment working; you should hear pool pumps and filtration running and feel water coming into the pool from submerged inlets.
- Skimmers or gutters should not be flooded, but have a thin layer of water running over the edge.

For more information about recreational water illness prevention visit <http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/swimmingpools.htm>.

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