



NEWS



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Make Swimming Healthy and Safe this Summer

A single diarrheal incident can introduce millions of germs into the water

As the temperatures rise this summer, so will the number of cases of recreational water illnesses (RWIs) as more and more people visit public pools and other water play areas. Recreational water illnesses are caused by germs and chemicals found in the water we swim in and are spread by swallowing, breathing in mist or aerosols of, or having contact with contaminated water. In Illinois, the most common RWI is diarrhea.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 1 in 5 American adults do not know that swimming while ill with diarrhea can heavily contaminate the water in which we swim and make other swimmers sick. When swimmers don't shower with soap before getting in the water or have a diarrheal incident while in the water, they may introduce fecal matter into the water. This fecal matter can introduce millions of germs into the water, some of which can make other swimmers sick with diarrhea if accidentally ingested.

To help keep swimming pools clean, safe, and fun this summer, residents are encouraged to follow these 7 steps for healthier swimming:

1. Stay out of the water if you have diarrhea
2. Shower with soap before you get into the water
3. Don't pee or poop in the water
4. Don't sit on water jets
5. Don't swallow the water
6. Take kids on bathroom breaks every 60 minutes
7. Check diapers every 30-60 minutes and change diapers away from the water

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Says Melissa Graven, Communicable Disease Supervisor at the McLean County Health Department, “Have you ever gone to a pool and noticed a strong chemical smell? Did you think that meant the pool water was really clean? Well, think again! What you are actually smelling are the chemicals that form when chlorine mixes with pee, poop, sweat, and dirt from swimmers’ bodies. It’s these chemicals -- not chlorine -- that can cause your eyes to get red and sting, make your nose run, and/or make you cough.”

The McLean County Health Department wants residents to have a fun and healthy time at the pool and to take steps to protect against germs each time they swim in a public pool or use a public hot tub. Graven and the staff at the health department are hoping residents will see the vital role they play in helping keep our public pools and water play areas safe for everyone.

“When we participate in events throughout the county we sometimes give out tee-shirts that say *I Am Public Health* to residents we see taking an active role in promoting public health practices,” explains Graven. “Each time an individual gets into the water at a public pool he/she has the power to help keep others healthy and safe in the water. The pool is only as clean as each person in it. If we all do our part, there will be a lot less to worry about.”

While chlorine and other pool disinfectants will kill most germs that cause RWIs in less than an hour, some diarrhea causing germs like *Cryptosporidium* can stay alive for days even in well maintained pools. To protect yourself, your family, and other swimmers, it’s best to help keep germs out of the water in the first place. Ultimately, health department staff would like everyone visiting public pools to be able to confidently say, ‘*I Am Public Health*’ because their actions personify public health. Keep the pee, poop, sweat, and dirt out of the water and spread information about healthier swimming, not germs, with family and friends around the pool this summer season.

The McLean County Health Department is dedicated to the prevention and control of disease through health promotion, early intervention, and health protection within the county. More information about health department services can be found at: <http://health@mcleancountyil.gov>.

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