

Pool Cues: Timely tips for a healthier swimming experience

In the last 20 years, there has been an increase in Recreational Water Illness (RWI) outbreaks tied to swimming pools, water parks, hot tubs, lakes, rivers and oceans, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports.

RWIs are contracted by swallowing, breathing, or having contact with contaminated water. The most frequently reported RWI from pools is diarrhea, caused by germs such as *Cryptosporidium* (Crypto), *Giardia*, *Shigella*, norovirus and *E. coli* O157:H7.

Skin infections such as "hot tub rash" are the most common RWIs spread through hot tubs and spas. The higher temperature of the water causes chlorine and other disinfectant levels to evaporate more rapidly.

Even more alarming, a recent study in *Pediatrics* found an increased incidence of asthma

("swimmer's asthma") in children who were regular swimmers. It is believed that infants are more vulnerable because their lungs are still developing. Because not a lot is known about the connection between frequent pool use and asthma in young children, pediatricians advise limiting children's exposure to heavily chlorinated indoor pools, especially ones that do not have adequate ventilation.

So what is a water lover to do? The first thing, obviously, is to check the pool before you dive in. Does the water look clean? Is it relatively free of odor? Determine how well the pool is maintained. CDC and Aquatics Safety Research Group suggest you find out if water chemistry is tested. Ask about chlorine and pH levels. Best chlorine levels are between 1 and 4ppm (not over 5ppm). The pH should be between 7.2 and 7.8; the ideal is 7.4, which is the pH of human tears.

Six recommended behaviors that will help keep RWIs at bay

CDC says there are six simple steps everyone can take to help protect against RWIs, and prevent germs from getting into our swimming pools.

- 1) Don't swim when you have diarrhea. Germs you spread in the water can make other people sick. This is especially important for children who are wearing diapers.
- 2) Don't swallow pool water. Avoid getting water in your mouth, and make sure that your kids understand this.
- 3) Shower before swimming; wash your hands after going to the bathroom or changing diapers. Germs on your body will end up in the water.

And, for parents of young children:

- 4) Take your kids on frequent bathroom breaks, or check diapers often. Waiting until your child "has to go" may mean it's too late.
- 5) Change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area, *not* at poolside. Germs can spread to surfaces and objects around the pool.
- 6) Wash your child thoroughly (especially his/her bottom) with soap and water before he or she goes swimming.



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