

What's Hiding in Your **POOL?**

By Dr. Rob Danoff

OK everyone, time to go to the pool. Here's our checklist: towels, water slippers, sunglasses, suntan lotion and prevention of RWI's. Huh, what's an RWI? Well, unfortunately the term RWI has become more common. It stands for recreational water illness, and some of these RWI's can be downright dangerous. Even though millions of people swim safely in public water recreational areas each year, it is important to know that certain infectious diseases can occur while swimming in "recreational water" such as swimming pools, waterparks, lakes, those decorative water fountains in the city, and the ocean.

COME ON DOC, IT'S A BIG POOL

Well, to put it bluntly, taking a dip in these areas is also a time when you are sharing the water and basically taking a bath with everyone else in the pool. While this may be a neat way to meet people, it is also a reason to practice good pool hygiene in order to prevent or decrease the chance of either spreading or getting an infection. While most of the potential infections involve the gastrointestinal tract and diarrhea, infections of the eyes, ears, respiratory system and skin can also occur.

WHAT ABOUT CHLORINE?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), chlorine does not make the water germ free, "But it does a good job of killing most germs." They also go on to state that, "A few germs can survive normal pool, hot tub, and spa levels of chlorine for several hours to days," and that chlorine levels MUST be properly maintained to kill most germs. In fact, the high water temperature in hot tubs and spas may cause chlorine to evaporate faster, and as a result, the levels may decrease to where the germ fighting is NOT up to par. Also, there is a good reason for those pool signs that suggest you shower before you enter the pool. (I know, you must be thinking, "What difference does it make, I'm going to get wet anyway?") Well, one of the main reasons for this is that our sweat contains nitrogen and ammonia, both of which can react with chlorine and reduce its effectiveness. In fact, urine, hair spray and suntan oil can all have the same effect. When this occurs, a chlorine smell may develop which could indicate that all is not well at the pool.

AVOIDING THE BACTERIAL THREAT

In order to help us with this mission, the CDC has released the following recreational swimming tips to decrease the chances of bacterial contamination.

- Try not to swallow the water.



- DO NOT enter the water if you have diarrhea. (People can spread germs in the water even without having an "accident").
- DO wash your hands and bottom thoroughly with soap and water after a bowel movement or changing diapers. The reason, germs on the hands can end up everywhere, including the pool water.
- DO notify the lifeguard if you see fecal matter in the water or if you see persons changing diapers on tables or chairs near the pool area.
- Notify the lifeguard if the water pumps for filtration have stopped working

FOR PARENTS

- ...DO take your child to the toilet for bathroom breaks often. (Waiting to hear, "I have to go" may be too late.)
- ...DO change diapers in the bathroom, not near the pool or shore because germs can contaminate surfaces around the water.
- ...DO wash your child thoroughly (especially his or her bottom) with soap and water before swimming.
- ...DO NOT count on swim diapers or pants to keep fecal matter from leaking into the water. (These products are not leak-proof).

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Pool coloration can provide some key clues as to water quality. Here are some warning signs which can indicate a water safety problem:

- Foamy buildup in a pool or spa means the water has organic

contaminants...not a good thing!

- A strange color. Pea green can indicate the presence of algae. A tiny green or reddish-brown may mean copper, iron or other metals in the water, which may indicate plumbing or other problems.
- Pink slimy stuff around railings or edges. This may actually be bacteria and indicate the pool chemicals are out of whack.
- For ocean water, avoid swimming for at least 24 hours after a heavy rain because stormwater runoff from the streets and drainage areas may wash pollution into the water.
- Avoid swimming near pipes which act as water runoff outlets from land based areas. Hanging out in beach water near one of these may be similar to washing yourself with the dirty water from your kitchen bucket after cleaning the floor.

SAFE SWIMMING

Above all else, do keep an eye on your child at all times. Additionally, here are some other safety tips from the American Red Cross:

- Always swim with a buddy; never alone
- Swim in life guard patrolled areas
- Alcohol and swimming don't mix. Alcohol impairs judgment, balance and coordination.
- Do not chew gum or eat while swimming as you could easily choke.
- Please stop swimming as soon as you hear or see a storm in the distance (lightening can travel as far as eight miles from the storm), and as you all probably remember from science class, water conducts electricity, so keep out of the pool or water.
- Listen to the signs that say no diving, as these areas are probably unsafe for this activity,
- And watch out for the "dangerous two's"; too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, and too much strenuous activity. If you experience any of these, then you too, should be out of the pool. *So let's keep the fun in summer by practicing water safety.*



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