

AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Pool health: Recognize signs of recreational water illnesses

Heading to a pool or water park is a favorite way for hot kids to cool off on a summer day. Splash pads, spray parks, water slides and pools beckon.

But unwelcome guests sometimes lurk in the water. Despite the use of chlorine and other chemical products, swimmers can be at risk for recreational water illness. Parents can take precautions to avoid the following common infections.



Diarrhea

Diarrhea is the most common illness that results from swallowing untreated or under-treated pool or spray park water. Infections usually are caused by *Escherichia coli* bacteria found in feces, or less often, *Cryptosporidium* organisms and *Giardia* parasites. Most people have about 0.14 grams of feces on their bottoms that can contaminate water when rinsed off, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Swallowing even a small amount of contaminated water can make a person sick.

To avoid spreading infection:

- insist that everyone shower before swimming;
- remind children not to swallow or drink pool water;
- take bathroom breaks every hour, and rinse off before going back into the water;
- change swim diapers often and away from the water; and
- do not swim if you have had diarrhea in the past two weeks.

Rashes and ear infections

Two types of infections can be caused by a bacteria called *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*: hot tub rash and swimmer's ear (outer ear infections). The germs often remain in hot tub water when the chlorine sanitizer level is not high enough. Rashes clear up on their own in a few days. Prevent swimmer's ear by drying ears thoroughly with a towel or a hair dryer. If ear pain is felt when the outer ear is moved, ask your pediatrician whether to use ear drops.

Chemical sensitivity

Chlorine's strong smell may be a sign that it is killing germs in the water, but too much is not a good thing. Symptoms of chlorine sensitivity include red eyes, coughing, breathing problems, chest tightness, wheezing, a stuffy or runny nose, itchy red skin or bumps, and sneezing. Seek immediate care for severe reactions. To alleviate mild problems, shower after swimming. Check with your pediatrician to find out if a corticosteroid cream or anti-histamine would help your child.

— Trisha Koriath