



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Six children sickened after playing in Opelika Splash Park and Aquatic Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health continues its investigation of the E. coli O157:H7 outbreak in Lee County. Six children who played in the Splash Park and Aquatic Center in Opelika between June 12 and June 18 have been identified with severe gastrointestinal illness as of Friday, June 24. Four of the six have been found positive for E. coli infection.

Four children were initially hospitalized at East Alabama Medical Center; three of them have subsequently been transferred to Children's Hospital of Alabama in Birmingham. The Health Department is continuing to work with the seven day care centers that had children at the Splash Park during the period of concern. Public health officials have advised that the children at the seven day care centers not participate in water sports activities until the extent of illness can be determined. Symptoms of E. coli can appear up until 10 days after exposure.

Illnesses in recreational waters are caused by germs spread by swallowing, breathing in mists or aerosols or having contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, water parks, hot tubs, interactive fountains, water play areas, lakes, rivers or oceans. Infection may also occur by touching the environment in petting zoos and other animal exhibits or by eating food prepared by people who did not wash their hands well after using the toilet.

The Splash Park was closed June 20 for testing. Parents have been asked to be alert for symptoms of illness. If a child has nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or abdominal cramps parents should seek medical attention for their child. Public Health and City of Opelika officials are monitoring the situation.

The Health Department and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend following the healthy swimming guidelines for people using recreational water facilities:

Three steps for all swimmers

1. DO NOT swim when you have diarrhea.
2. AVOID swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools, and backyard "kiddie" pools.
3. 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.

Three steps for parents of young children

1. Take your children on bathroom breaks or check diapers often.
2. Change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area and not at poolside.

3. Wash your children thoroughly with soap and water before they go swimming.

Visit adph.org or CDC's Healthy Swimming Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming> to learn how to protect yourself and others by following tips for healthy swimming.

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