



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Recreational water safety is a yearlong goal

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Swimming is a popular recreational activity that Alabamians enjoy at all times of the year, not just in the summer. Healthy swimming behaviors don't just mean refraining from running around the pool or avoiding glass containers. They mean making sure that chlorine and pH levels in pools where your family swims are kept at correct levels. If they aren't, severe infections can be acquired that may even be deadly.

The Alabama Department of Public Health encourages all pool owners and operators to take the steps needed to maintain good water quality and asks all people to take an active role in protecting their health from infections wherever they swim. These include pools at your child's day care center, apartment complexes and condominiums, subdivision, and in your own home's pool.

This summer several children and adults in Alabama suffered illnesses that were linked to infections caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 after they had visited water parks. These serious illnesses which led to hospitalizations emphasize the importance of regularly checking and maintaining proper chlorine and pH levels in all pools, both public and privately owned.

Illnesses are spread by swallowing, breathing in mists or aerosols, or having contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, hot tubs, water parks, water play areas, interactive fountains, 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.

A wide variety of infections can result including gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic and wound infections. In addition to *E. coli*, diarrheal illnesses can be caused by germs such as *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, *Shigella* and *Norovirus*. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends free chlorine levels between 1-3 parts per million and pH levels between 7.2 and 7.8 for recreational swimming pools.

The Health Department and the CDC 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 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.

Review the tips on how to protect yourself and others at www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming.