



FACT SHEET

Disease Prevention

for Parents and Childcare Providers

Swimming

Swimming and Disease

Swimming is a fun, healthy activity for children. Unfortunately, there are also a few diseases associated with swimming. These diseases are called recreational water illnesses. Children are more susceptible to disease than are adults, and they also spend more time swimming, wading, and playing in water, so children are at high risk for recreational water illness. Fortunately, there are a few simple precautions that can be taken to reduce the risk.

Illnesses caused by germs such as *E.coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Giardia*, and *Cryptosporidium* have been associated with waterparks, water fountains, pools, hot tubs, rivers, lakes, streams, and oceans. These germs come from human or animal feces. Symptoms associated with these diseases include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever. Complications in children that may result from these diseases include dehydration, hospitalization, kidney failure, meningitis, or septicemia. Skin, ear, eye, and urinary tract infections can also result from swimming in contaminated water.

Most swimming pools, wading pools, water parks, and hot tubs are chlorinated, but chlorine takes time to work, and many factors influence how well it works. Just because the water is chlorinated does not make it completely safe. Natural bodies of water do not contain any chlorine.

Disease Prevention

The following measures will help prevent recreational water illnesses in children:

- **Teach children not to swallow or get water in their mouth while swimming, wading, or playing in recreational water.** This is the best way to keep children from getting sick from swimming. Keep in mind that everyone's body parts are in the water.

Over⇒

- **Do not allow children with diarrhea, vomiting/nausea, skin infections, or open wounds or sores to swim.** This is the best way to keep germs from getting into the water. State law requires that people with these conditions refrain from entering public swimming areas.
- **Do not allow children to drink from water park fountains.** This water is usually recirculated from the fountain and is not fresh drinking water.
- Bathe children before swimming, especially the rear end.
- Practice good hand washing every time after diapering infants, change diapers often, and don't change diapers at poolside where germs may get spread around on surfaces and into the pool.
- Take children to the restroom frequently, practicing good hand washing techniques for everyone.
- Do not swim in pools that appear cloudy or otherwise do not appear to be well maintained. Consider notifying the management and/or the Health Department in this situation.
- Wash children's hands before eating.
- Rinse or wash off after swimming. Dry the body and ears thoroughly.
- Change water in wading pools often and/or chlorinate, or use the sprinkler instead.

Do not allow children 5 and under into hot tubs. Young children heat up quickly and do not recognize the signs of heat stroke! Hot tubs are not the place for young children or babies.

Remember, most recreational water illnesses that are reported are diarrheal illnesses, so have fun swimming but *don't drink the water*.

Please contact the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department at (406) 447-8352 with any questions.