
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Avoid illness while swimming – Share the fun, not the germs!

GRAND RAPIDS – Pools, waterparks, and splash pads will soon be packed with people looking to have fun, be active or just relax while enjoying the summer heat. The Kent County Health Department knows that swimming is one of the most popular recreation activities and can be a part of a healthy exercise routine, but recreational waters can also make us ill. That’s why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention designated the week May 18-24, 2015 as **Healthy and Safe Swimming Week**.

The focus is on how swimmers, parents of young swimmers, aquatics and beach staff, residential pool owners and public health officials can help minimize the risk of recreational water illness (RWI). RWI’s can be caused by germs that are spread by either swallowing or just making contact with contaminated water *anywhere* you swim. RWI’s represent a wide array of infections including gastrointestinal, ear, skin, respiratory and wound infections.

“Our staff has investigated several outbreaks that were linked to fecal material in swimming water,” says Adam London, Kent County Administrative Health Officer. “Cryptosporidium, Shigella and *E coli* can spread quickly when someone who is sick introduces the germs to the water. When those germs stick to hands or get in your mouth, you or your family can become ill, and in some cases, the illness can be dangerous.”

Pool chemicals like chlorine and bromine are used to kill germs but they do not work immediately. If used correctly they can kill most germs in minutes, but Cryptosporidium can live in properly treated pool water for several days.

Since we all share the water and the germs in it, it is important to know how to protect yourself. For swimmers, it is important to NEVER SWALLOW the water you swim in. You can help protect others by showering before you enter the water and not urinating or defecating in the water. Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and fresh water before handling food. Every hour – everyone out! Use the opportunity to take kids on bathroom breaks. Change diapers in a changing area and not near the pool or water. For pool owners it is important to maximize the germ killing power of chlorine. More information can be found [here](#).

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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