

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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Steve Todd, Health Officer

517-279-9561, ext. 148

Theresa Christner, Health Promotion/Ed. Dir.

517-279-9561, ext. 144

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Recreational Water Illnesses (RWI)

Labor Day may mark the end of summer vacation, but not the end of summer. Many people will continue to keep their pools and hot tubs open during the next month. Some will plan tubing, kayaking or canoeing trips on their local river and/or lake. Others are planning destination trips which will include hotels with pools, hot tubs and/or attached waterparks. Regardless of whether you like soaking in a hot tub, doing laps in a pool to stay fit or paddling down the river in a kayak to enjoy changing colors, you can still be exposed unknowingly to a recreational water illness. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers the following tips to help prevent recreational water illnesses.

RWIs include a wide variety of infections, such as gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic, and wound infections. The most commonly reported RWI is diarrhea. Diarrhea may be caused by many kinds of germs, including: Crypto (short for Cryptosporidium), Giardia, Shigella, Norovirus and E. coli.

According to Rebecca Burns, Environmental Health Director for the local health department, "Each year, the health department investigates water-borne disease outbreaks which occur because of people coming in contact with germs through their recreational water activities. Most recently, we had an outbreak of crypto which was associated with a pool party. It's important to take the right precautions to prevent the spread of germs that cause these illnesses."

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To help prevent recreational water illnesses:

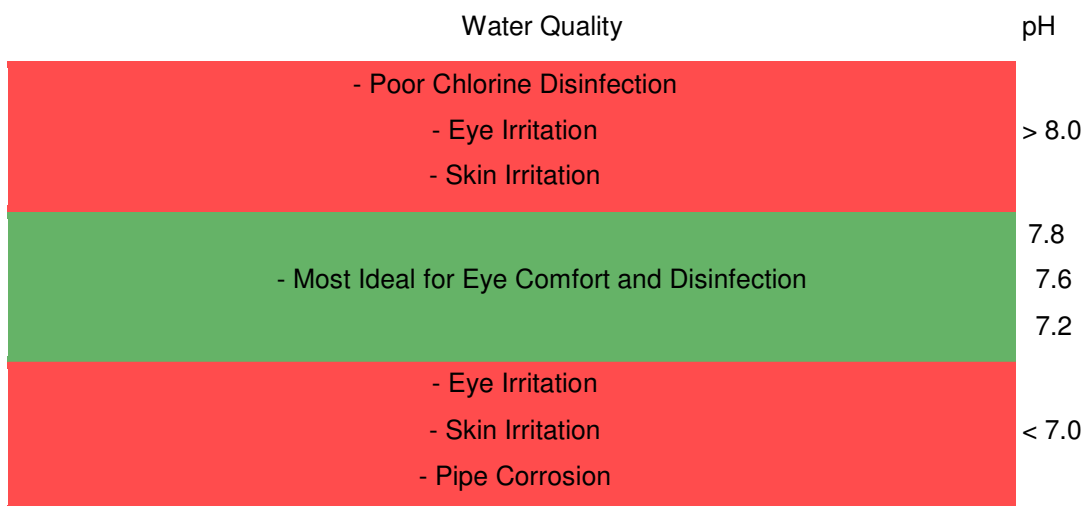
- Don't swim when you have diarrhea. This can spread germs in the water and make others sick.
- Don't swallow pool or lake water. Avoid getting the water in your mouth.
- Practice good hygiene. Shower with soap before swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Germs on your body end up in the water.
- Make sure children who are not toilet-trained wear swim diapers.
- Parents of young children should wash their children before swimming, take kids to the bathroom every 30 to 60 minutes and check their diapers.
- Change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area and not at poolside. Germs can spread in and around the pool.

To make sure your pool or hot tub is safe, the health department recommends the following advice:

- **Using chlorine.** Chlorine kills germs in pools--but it takes time to work. Therefore, it's important to make sure chlorine levels are always at the levels recommended by the health department (usually between 1.0 - 3.0 ppm).
- **Routinely test your chlorine levels.** All sorts of things can reduce chlorine levels in pool water. Some examples are sunlight, dirt, debris, and material from swimmers' bodies. That's why chlorine levels must be routinely measured. However, the time it takes for chlorine to work is also affected by pH.
- **Check the pH.** pH is a measurement used to tell you how acidic or basic your water is and the pH levels affect the germ-killing power of the chlorine you have in your water. As pH goes up, the ability of chlorine to kill germs goes down. pH is also important for the user's comfort and health. Keeping the pH in the appropriate range balances the chlorine's germ-killing power while minimizing skin and eye irritation of the user.

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Relationship between pH and Water Quality



Recreational water activities can be fun and a good source for physical fitness. Make sure you get the best benefits out of your activities by making sure you stay disease free. To learn more about waterborne diseases, check out our website at www.bhsj.org and click on our Frequently Asked Questions button.

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