



# Illinois Department of Public Health announces Health and Safe Swimming Week

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SPRINGFIELD – Memorial Day weekend is when many pools and beaches open for the summer. This week is Health and Safe Swimming Week, which is a good time to remind people about what they can do to stay safe and healthy while swimming.

“Swimming is not only a fun summer activity for kids of all ages, but it’s also a great form of exercise that can help keep your heart healthy and lower your risk of obesity,” said Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “However, swimmers need to take an active role in helping protect themselves and preventing the spread of germs. We all share the water we swim in, and we each need to do our part to help keep ourselves and our families and friends healthy.”

This year’s theme is, “Diarrhea and Swimming Don’t Mix.” Diarrheal incidents in recreational water can lead to outbreaks. Diarrhea is often caused by germs like Crypto

(short for *Cryptosporidium*), *Giardia*, norovirus, *Shigella*, and *E. coli* O157:H7. Just one diarrheal incident in the water can release enough germs, that if a person swallows a mouthful of water, it could cause diarrhea lasting up to 2-3 weeks. Many people think chlorine will kill germs in the water instantly, but some germs can survive for days in properly chlorinated pools. Crypto can survive in an adequately chlorinated pool for more than one week and is the leading cause of disease outbreaks linked to swimming. Other common recreational water illnesses include skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic, and wound infections.

Simple and effective prevention steps:

- Shower before getting in the pool.
- Stay out of the water if you have diarrhea – swim diapers will not contain diarrhea if your child has an accident in the pool!
- Don't pee or poop in the water.
- Don't swallow the water.
- Do your part! Report it if you or your child has a diarrheal incident while swimming.

Every hour—everyone out!

- Take kids on bathroom breaks.
- Check diapers and change them in a bathroom or diaper changing area—not poolside.

Swimming in lakes and other natural bodies of water comes with a unique set of risks such as *Naegleria fowleri*, “the brain-eating ameba,” and harmful algal blooms.

*Naegleria fowleri* is a microscopic ameba commonly found in warm freshwater lakes and rivers. If water containing the ameba goes up the nose, it can cause a rare, but devastating infection of the brain. To reduce your chances of becoming ill, limit the amount of water up your nose, avoid putting your head underwater, hold your nose or use nose clips, and avoid stirring up mud and scum while swimming in warm freshwater areas.

Algae can grow in warm freshwater areas and in large amounts can be harmful to people – harmful algal blooms. You should stay out of water that contains harmful algal blooms. If you see that the beach is closed, stay out of it, and don't swim, water ski, or boat in areas where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum, or mats of algae on the water's surface.

To check the status of a swimming facility licensed by IDPH, use the [IDPH Swimming Facility Search](#) on our website. To learn about beach closures, advisories, and test results, check the online [Illinois Beach Guard System](#).

