



PRESS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release
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Hyde County Health Officials Encourage People to Adopt Healthy Swimming Behaviors as Part of National Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week

SWAN QUARTER - Hyde County health officials are reminding swimmers to follow a few safety tips to prevent getting sick this summer.

Officials' safety message comes as we prepare for national Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week from May 24-30.

"Summer is a fantastic time to lounge by the pool but a few basic precautions may just prevent you from becoming sick," said Wesley P. Smith, Hyde County Health Director. "Infectious agents from animals or on swimmers' bodies can end up in the water and make other people sick. It is important to adopt health swimming behaviors to prevent illnesses associated with recreational swimming venues."

Smith offers seven (7) key steps to avoid water-borne illnesses this summer:

1. Do not swim or allow children to swim if you or they have diarrhea;
2. Do not swallow pool/river/ocean water or get it in your mouth;
3. Everyone should shower before swimming;
4. Wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers;
5. Children should wear tight-fitting swim diapers, and diapers should be checked before entering the water;
6. Take children on bathroom breaks; and
7. Change children's diapers often and in a bathroom, not at the poolside.

Following simple health guidelines like good hygiene and avoiding getting water in one's mouth can help protect swimmers from a variety of infectious illnesses, and if one does become ill, ensure that they get prompt medical attention.

Although healthy swimmers can get sick from recreational water illnesses, or RWIs, the young and elderly, and persons with a weakened

immune system, as well as pregnant women and diabetics, are especially at risk.

State and local health officials have investigated numerous cases of RWI caused by *Cryptosporidium*, a chlorine-resistant parasite primarily associated with treated recreational water venues such as pools and water parks. It also can be found in natural bodies of water, soil, food or on surfaces that have been contaminated with infected human or animal feces.

Although cryptosporidiosis usually causes only mild gastroenteritis in healthy persons, it may cause serious illness in those with compromised immune systems. This parasite is able to survive and remain infectious for long periods of time, even in chlorinated pools.

Marine vibrios, which are naturally-occurring bacteria found in salty waters, can also cause illness in people who swim in recreational waters. Last year, nine cases of illness caused by vibrios were reported in North Carolina, but it is possible many more went unreported.

People may become infected by *Vibrio vulnificus* and other marine vibriosthrough injuries such as a puncture or laceration from finfish or shellfish or exposure of open wounds to coastal waters. Symptoms of infected wounds include pain, swelling and redness that may quickly spread or blister. Although the risk of infection is low, once infection occurs people must be diagnosed early and treated appropriately. People who have liver disease, diabetes or are immuno-compromised are particularly at risk for infection and death from this disease.

Water contamination by sewage or stormwater runoff also can cause problems. People also have an increased risk of becoming sick from swimming in natural waters in both coastal and inland areas, especially in areas downstream from sewage treatment facilities and in all areas after storm events. Storm events are associated with increased runoff from cities as well as forests, farms and pasture lands, which can be sources of *Cryptosporidium*, fecal bacteria and viruses known to cause human illness.

For more information about Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week and healthy swimming, visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at: www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming. For North Carolina specific information, visit www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/ehs/pti_healthyswimming.htm, or contact the N.C. Division of Environmental Health at (919) 733-2884.

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