

# Recreational Water Illnesses

Contrary to popular belief, chlorine does not kill all germs instantly. Some germs are very tolerant of chlorine, and once they get in the pool it can take minutes or even days for chlorine to kill them. Swallowing just a little water that contains these germs can make you sick.

RWIs include a wide variety of infections, such as gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic, and wound infections. The most commonly reported RWIs are caused by germs such as *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, *Shigella*, norovirus and *E. coli*.

Teach your children these easy and effective healthy swimming tips to help protect everyone from RWIs:

- Don't swim when you are sick.
- Shower with soap before you start swimming, and wash your hands after using the toilet.
- Don't swallow the water you swim in.
- Parents should also make sure their pool, hot tub, or spa is at the proper free chlorine level and pH before getting into the water.

Parents of young children should take a few extra steps:

- Take children on bathroom breaks or check diapers often. All children who are not toilet-trained must wear swim diapers.
- Change diapers in the bathroom or diaper-changing area and not at poolside where germs can rinse into the water.

## **Swimmer's Ear (acute external otitis)**

Swimmer's ear is an infection in the outer ear canal, which runs from your eardrum to the outside of your head. It's often brought on by water that remains in your ear after swimming or bathing, creating a moist environment that aids bacterial growth.

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Swimmer's ear may start with some itching, but it's important not to scratch because this can worsen the infection. Ear pain is the most common sign of swimmer's ear. Even touching or bumping the outside of the ear can hurt. The infection can also make it harder to hear with the infected ear because of the swelling that happens in the ear canal. Mild swimmer's ear can generally be treated with prescription ear drops that contain an antibiotic to kill the bacteria.

Help your kids to follow these steps to avoid swimmer's ear:

- Keep your ears dry. Dry your ears thoroughly after exposure to moisture from swimming or bathing. Dry only your outer ear, wiping it slowly and gently with a soft towel or cloth. Tip your head to the side to help water drain from your ear canal.
- Avoid putting foreign objects in your ear. Never attempt to scratch an itch or dig out earwax with items such as a cotton swab, paper clip or hairpin. Using these items can pack material deeper into your ear canal and break or irritate the thin skin inside your ear.
- Use caution after an ear infection or surgery. If you've recently had an ear infection or ear surgery, talk to your doctor before you go swimming.
- Swim wisely. Watch for signs at lakes and beaches alerting swimmers to high bacterial counts and don't swim on those days.

## **Eczema (Atopic Dermatitis)**

The National Eczema Association estimates that over 30 million Americans may have a skin problem called eczema. Eczema is a non-contagious, inflammatory skin condition in which the affected skin has a hypersensitivity reaction and breaks out in an itchy rash. Eczema is commonly found in the folds of the elbows and knees, and on the feet, hands, neck, and face. Swimming and summer heat can sometimes make this reaction worse. The rash may be further irritated by swimming in salt water, or pools containing chlorine and other potentially irritating chemicals

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that have a drying effect. Spending extended periods of time in the water or soaking in very hot water, like in a hot tub, can also worsen symptoms.

To help reduce irritation from swimming, people with eczema should:

- Take a bath or shower using a mild cleanser shortly after swimming to wash off any salt or chemicals
- Use a soft towel to pat yourself dry
- Apply a dermatologist approved moisturizing lotion to your entire body
- Limit how long you are in the water
- Avoid hot tubs/spas

## **Athlete's Foot**

Athlete's foot is a fungal infection of the skin on your foot that thrives in warm, moist areas. Your risk for getting athlete's foot increases in the summer if your feet are kept wet for long periods of time, or if you have increased sweating. Athlete's foot is also contagious and can be passed via surfaces like pool decks, showers, and locker rooms.

To prevent this common summer condition:

- Avoid walking barefoot. Always wear shoes or sandals when walking around at public pools and showers.
- Dry your feet thoroughly, especially between the toes, before putting on your shoes and socks.
- Change your shoes and socks during the day if they become saturated with sweat.
- Give your shoes a chance to fully dry out between uses by alternating pairs every 2-3 days.