

News from the Wyoming Department of Health and the Wyoming Department of Agriculture

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Swimming-related Illnesses Take Away Pool Time Fun

While splashing in the waters of Wyoming's pools is a favorite activity for many families, swimmers should take steps to avoid catching or spreading recreational water illnesses (RWI) that can take away their pool time fun.

"Basically diseases such as cryptosporidiosis and giardiasis are caused when parasites, or germs, get into the places we swim," said Kelly Weidenbach, an epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH). Symptoms of these diseases in humans can occur days to weeks after exposure and include active diarrhea, stomach cramping, nausea and loss of appetite.

"We began seeing increases in cryptosporidiosis cases here in 2006. While national rates have also increased, Wyoming's incidence rate is nearly three times as high as the national rate," Weidenbach said. In 2012, 35 cryptosporidiosis cases were reported to WDH; 40 percent among Campbell County residents.

Weidenbach said most recreational water illnesses are caused by contamination with fecal matter. "To prevent the spread of those germs, we strongly encourage people to shower before entering pools or hot tubs," she added.

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture inspects public pools in Wyoming. Together, the agencies monitor RWI linked with public pools, hot tubs and hot springs across the state.

"We also work with pool operators to encourage healthy standards and practices that are important to maintain healthy swimming environments," said Dean Finkenbinder, consumer health services manager with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture.

Weidenbach said normal pool disinfection measures may not fully kill the parasites, which are also found in untreated water sources such as lakes, rivers and ponds. Simple steps swimmers can take to help protect themselves and others include:

- Don't swim on days when experiencing diarrhea. Germs can spread in the water and make others sick.
- Don't swallow pool water. Avoid getting water in the mouth.
- Practice good hygiene. Shower with soap before swimming and wash hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Germs on the body end up in the water.
- Parents of young children should remember to:
 - Wash children before swimming (especially rear ends).
 - Check diapers every 30–60 minutes. Change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area and not at poolside. Germs can spread in and around the pool.
 - Take children to the bathroom every 30–60 minutes. Waiting to hear "I have to go" may mean it's too late.

For more information about healthy swimming, visit www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/.

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