

## Information on Swimming and Other Activities in Recreational Waters

In warm weather, oceans, lakes, and rivers are a source of swimming enjoyment across the state each year for about one third of the population over the age of 16.

### There is some risk of disease transmission when swimming in lakes and streams

**Recreational water illnesses (RWIs)** are caused by germs spread by swallowing, breathing in mists or aerosols of, or having contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, hot tubs, water parks, water play areas, interactive fountains, lakes, rivers, or oceans. RWIs can also be caused by chemicals in the water or chemicals that evaporate from the water and cause indoor air quality problems.

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. Diarrheal illnesses are caused by germs such as *Crypto* (short for *Cryptosporidium*), *Giardia*, *Shigella*, norovirus and *E. coli* O157:H7. With RWI outbreaks on the rise, swimmers need to take an active role in helping to protect themselves and prevent the spread of germs. It is important for swimmers to learn the basic facts about RWIs so they can keep themselves and their family healthy every time they swim.

**Blue-Green Algae:** Most blooms are non-toxic, but some produce toxins which can cause illness in pets and livestock after drinking lake water.

**Bryozoans:** Large jelly-like blobs in a lake

**Leeches:** Common in shallow, weedy shoreline areas of many lakes and streams. Learn how to remove one, if you find one on your skin

**Swimmer's Itch:** A skin irritation caused by small parasites that burrow under the skin, found in some lakes

***Vibrio vulnificus* (Vv in short)** is a bacterium in the same family as those that cause cholera. It normally lives in warm **seawater** and is part of a group of *Vibrios* that require a salty environment. *Vibrio vulnificus* is NOT a contaminant; it occurs in sea water everywhere.

### What are the symptoms?

**General waterborne illness:** Symptoms may be visible from one day up to four weeks after being exposed and include: cramps, diarrhea, vomiting, fever, headache, and/or eye, ear and skin infections.

**Swimmer's itch symptoms:** Include burning and itching of infected skin within five minutes to an hour after leaving the

water, and small reddish pimples within 12 hours.

**Toxic blue-green algae symptoms:** Similar to waterborne illness, but can also include numbness of the lips, tingling in the fingers and toes, and dizziness.

***V. vulnificus*** can cause disease in those who eat colonized seafood or have an open wound that is exposed to seawater. Among healthy people, ingestion of Vv can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. In immuno-compromised persons, particularly those with chronic liver disease, Vv can infect the bloodstream, causing a severe and life-threatening septic shock, or an infection of the skin when open wounds are exposed to warm seawater. Vv is often called a "flesh eating bacterium".

**Persons who are immuno-compromised or who have advanced liver failure** are at high risk for fatal complications.

### Prevent Swimming-Related Illnesses and Injuries

Here are some key things you can do to reduce your risk of illness and injury and make your trip to the beach safe and pleasant for your family:

- **Avoid large crowds of bathers.** The larger the number of swimmers, the higher the risk of illness transmission.
- **Don't swallow swimming water.** It's probably impossible to avoid swallowing some water while swimming, but the less you swallow, the less likely you'll consume enough to make you sick.
- **After swimming, wash your hands before eating.**
- **Avoid areas where there is animal waste or obvious sources of pollution nearby,** such as sewage discharge or storm water pipes, or other obvious sources. There are many bacteria, viruses and parasites that cause disease in humans that can be spread by fecal waste from wild and domestic animals, and humans.
- **Protect yourself from swimmer's itch.** Avoid swimming in areas where there is evidence of ducks and geese. Apply a good waterproof sunscreen prior to entering the water. Use a towel to dry off immediately after swimming.
- **Avoid swimming in areas where there are obvious algae blooms.** Some blue-green algae produce toxins, which have caused illness in pets and livestock. Keep children and pets out of the water when an algae bloom is present.

### Avoid Contaminating Others

To avoid becoming a contamination source to others, follow these simple steps:

- Shower before you swim, if possible.
- Do not swim, or allow family members to swim, if currently ill with a gastrointestinal illness (vomiting and diarrhea), or have been ill within the last few days.
- Keep children who are not toilet-trained out of the water.
- Do not allow children with dirty diapers in the water.
- Do not swim if you have a skin infection.
- Keep pets off the beach and out of the swimming areas.

**Prevent drowning.** Know where safety equipment, such as ring buoys and reaching poles, are located. Make sure personal floatation devices are available and are worn when boating. These are especially important for persons using canoes, inflatable boats, jet skis, and other powerboats. Carefully supervise young children and poor swimmers when near the water.

If you are informed and practice these risk-reduction techniques, you can relax and enjoy the summer at your favorite swimming beach. Please share this information with others, so they, too, can enjoy the elements.

CDC's Healthy Swimming web site is heavily focused on swimming in chlorinated and disinfected swimming venues. The following webpage contains useful information that also applies to swimming in natural bodies of water

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/swimmers/steps-healthy-swimming.html> .