LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Public Health

Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section
Office of Public Health,
Louisiana Dept. of Health
800-256-2748 (24 hr. number)
http://infectiousdisease.ldh.la.gov

Wild Animals in Swimming Pools

What should I do if I find that a wild animal has been in my swimming pool?

Louisiana citizens are sometimes greatly surprised to find unwelcome critters swimming or bathing in swimming pools. Most folks that experience such a shock are left with questions concerning residual health risks associated with a wild animal visitor.

First, persuade the animal to leave. Children and pets should be excluded from the area until the animal departs. Smaller wild animals are easily frightened away by making very loud noises, or by throwing rocks or sticks in the general direction of the animal. There is no need to actually strike the animal. Should a wild animal act aggressively and/or refuse to leave the area, or if the animal is a larger species, individuals should remain at a safe distance and call animal control agencies, wildlife officials or 911 emergency. (Always avoid direct contact with a wild animal or any of the animal's tissues or bodily fluids.)

Often wild animals are attracted to swimming pools due to availability of extensive food sources. Unsecured or unsealed pet foods and garbage can attract these animals. Pet foods and garbage should be kept in tightly covered containers that cannot be tipped over.

Do not attempt to lure wild animals near your home for entertainment purposes. It is important to remember that these animals are not pets and, thus, may be a source of injury and transmission of zoonotic diseases, such as rabies and tularemia.

What health risks may be in the water if a wild animal was found there?

Organisms such as *Cryptosporidium* species and *Escherichia coli* have been transmitted to swimmers in pools through inadvertent consumption of water contaminated with fecal matter or vomitus from both humans and animals. Therefore contamination of swimming pools with these substances, or from the presence of a dead animal can be a risk, especially for children, seniors and the immunosuppressed.

How can I take care of possible water contamination?

The first step in avoiding a problem is preventive in nature. Pool owners should routinely maintain proper chemical levels in pool water, and should ensure that the pool is maintained at a proper pH.

The filtration system should be functioning properly and maintenance of the filter should be routine. A short duration visit by an unwelcome creature in a well-maintained pool is likely not a problem as long as the animal leaves **nothing** behind. Swimming should be suspended until free available chlorine residual levels and pH are checked and verified to be within normal limits.

In the event that a dead animal, feces or vomitus is discovered in the pool, the following recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should be followed:

- Swimming should cease immediately until the material is removed and sanitation efforts are complete.

- Nets or scoops can be used to remove the material; the material should never be removed by hand. Vacuuming the pool is not recommended since many pools vacuum materials through the filtration system.

- Should vomitus or formed stool be discovered in chlorine pools, the free available chlorine concentration should be raised to two parts per million (2 ppm or 2 mg/L), and the pH maintained at 7.5 or less with a pool water temperature of 77°F or higher, for a minimum of 25 minutes. Maintenance of the free available chlorine at 3 ppm permits disinfection time to be reduced to 19 minutes.

- If a dead animal or if diarrhea is found, the free available chlorine should be raised to 20 ppm or 20 mg/L and pH level maintained at 7.5 or less with a pool water temperature of 77°F or higher for a minimum of 12 hours and 45 minutes.

Other combinations of chlorine levels and time may be effective; however the suggested parameters should be obtained from reputable pool maintenance professionals or the CDC Recreational Water Illnesses website (http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/pdf/swimming/pools/fecal-incident-response-recommendations.pdf).

- When checking chemical levels, samples/measurements should be taken from a minimum of three separate locations distant from water inlets/sources to ensure that chemical levels are sufficient while pH levels are properly maintained throughout the entire pool.

- In the process of disinfection, remember to disinfect nets and/or scoops. This can be done by first cleaning the net or scoop and then submerging these objects in the swimming pool during the disinfection process.

- During the disinfection process, the filtration system should be operating continuously. Once the levels of free available chlorine are maintained at the proper

pH levels for sufficient duration, backwash the filter to waste and not back into the filter or pool.

When is swimming allowed again?

Swimming can resume when the free available chlorine residuals are not greater than 3.0 ppm nor less than 1.0 ppm and the pH level is not less than 7.2 nor greater than 7.8.

Contact times listed in the paragraph above are calculated for water at 77°F (25°C). To achieve an equivalent kill of pathogenic organisms, the disinfection process will have to be continued for progressively longer periods of time when or as the water temperature becomes colder than 77°F.

Use of other pool disinfectants is not mentioned because limited data is available regarding inactivation of pathogens by these products. Often it is best to check with an experienced pool aquatic professional if the above conditions cannot be met.

Should a raccoon be discovered in a swimming pool, special filtration processes are recommended to eliminate problems with the raccoon roundworm, *Baylisascaris procyonis*, which has been associated with severe neurologic illness in children. (Consult with the state public health veterinarian for recommendations.)

Excerpted from the Louisiana Morbidity Report, Sep.-Oct., 2011, Vol 22, No.5 pp 4-5
http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/assets/oph/Center-PHCH/Center-CH/infectious-epi/LMR/2011-2020/2011/sepoct11.pdf

This document was prepared using the latest information available to the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section and the State Public Health Veterinarian. Should any of this information be outdated or incorrect, please inform the State Public Health Veterinarian so updates and corrections can be made as soon as possible.