Safe Swimming – Avoiding Injury and Illness

*National Recreational Water Illness and Injury Prevention Week*
*May 23 - 29, 2011*

**SPRINGFIELD** – As swimming pools, water parks and beaches get ready to open this upcoming Memorial Day weekend, Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Damon T. Arnold is encouraging people to learn how to protect themselves from injury and illness. The focus of this year’s National Recreational Water Illness and Injury Prevention Week is swimmer’s ear. Swimmer’s ear is an infection of the outer ear canal that can cause pain and discomfort for swimmers of all ages.

“Swimmer’s ear is something many of us have heard of, and possibly even had, but may not know much about it,” said Dr. Arnold. “This year during National Recreational Water Illness and Injury Week, we’re offering simple step you can take to avoid swimmer’s ear.”

**Swimmer’s Ear Prevention Tips**

**Do:**
- Use a bathing cap, ear plugs or custom-fitted swim molds to keep water out of your ears.
- Dry your ears thoroughly with a towel after swimming.
- Tilt your head to each side to allow water to escape the ear canal.
- Pull your earlobe in different directions while the ear is faced down to help water drain.
- Talk with your health care provider before using ear drops after swimming.

**Don’t:**
- Don’t put objects in the ear canal (including cotton-tip swabs, pencils, paperclips, or fingers).
- Don’t try to remove ear wax. Ear wax helps protect your ear canal from infection.

Symptoms of swimmer’s ear usually appear within a few days of swimming and include itchy, flaky, swollen or painful ears, possibly with drainage from the infected ear.
The goal of National Recreational Water Illness and Injury Prevention Week is to highlight the simple steps swimmers can take to avoid illness.

The best way to prevent recreational water illnesses (RWIs) is to keep germs out of the water in the first place. Follow these healthy swimming steps:

For all swimmers
- Don’t swim when you have diarrhea.
- Don’t swallow pool water.
- Practice good hygiene. Shower with soap before swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Germs on your body end up in the water.

For Parents of Young Children
- Take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often. All children who are not toilet-trained should wear tightly fitting rubber or plastic pants.
- Change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area and not poolside.
- Wash your children thoroughly (especially the rear end) with soap and water before they go swimming.

Recreational water illnesses can be caused by germs like Crypto (short for Cryptosporidium), Giardia, E. coli 0157:H7, and Shigella, and are spread by accidentally swallowing water that has been contaminated with fecal matter. If someone with diarrhea contaminates the water, swallowing the water can make you sick. Most germs are killed by chlorine, but some germs, like Crypto, are resistant to chlorine and can live in pools for days. That is why even the best maintained pools can spread illnesses.

Illness can also be caused by an improper chemical balance in pools, water parks and spas and can be identified by burning eyes, nose and lungs. The following are things you can look for to prevent illness.

- Clean and clear pool water; you should be able to clearly see any painted stripes and the bottom of the pool.
- Smooth pool sides; tiles should not be sticky or slippery.
- No odor; a well-chlorinated pool has little odor. A strong chemical smell indicates a maintenance problem.
- Pool equipment working; you should hear pool pumps and filtration running and feel water coming into the pool from submerged inlets.
- Skimmers or gutters should not be flooded, but have a thin layer of water running over the edge.
For more information about recreational water illness prevention visit http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/swimmingpools.htm.

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