

Your Health Matters

MAKE A HEALTHY SPLASH!

Memorial Day signals the start of the summer swimming season as local pools and splash parks open. Those favorite pools, streams and lakes can bring hours of refreshing fun, but hidden beneath their sparkling waves can be germs that cause diarrhea and other recreational water illnesses.

We encourage people to get out and enjoy the local pools and swimming holes but to first take precautions to protect themselves against recreational water illnesses.

Recreational water illnesses are caused by parasites, bacteria, viruses and other germs that contaminate swimming water. These germs get in creeks and streams from animals, sewage, rain water runoff, and swimmers. Swimmers also shed germs into swimming pools.

When people get contaminated water in their nose, eyes or mouth, the germs can cause skin rashes, swimmer's ear, gastrointestinal infections, and other illnesses. Diarrhea is the most commonly reported recreational water illness, and can be caused by germs like *Shigella*, *E. coli*, *Giardia*, or *Cryptosporidium*.

Chlorine does kill most germs in less than an hour, if it is maintained appropriately. However, it doesn't kill all germs instantly, and *Cryptosporidium* can survive for up to a week.

You can help protect your family from recreational water illnesses and ensure a safer swimming environment for others by following these simple steps:

- No one should swim if they have diarrhea.
- Don't get water in your mouth or swallow it.
- If you are swimming in natural waters like lakes or streams, don't get water in your face.
- Shower before swimming and wash your hands after using the bathroom.
- Take your child on frequent bathroom breaks and change swim diapers often.
- Change diapers in the bathroom, not beside the pool or stream.
- Always wash your hands after swimming and before eating or drinking.
- Dry swimming water out of your ears.

For healthy swimming, the best defense is a good offense. You can test the water yourself with simple chlorine test strips available at most superstores or hardware stores. Pools should have a proper free chlorine level of 1–3 mg/L or parts per million [ppm] and a pH level of 7.2–7.8 to maximize germ-killing.

To learn more, visit www.montgomerycountyhealth.org, Facebook or Twitter, or call 573-564-2495. The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. ■



Linda Harman