



# EL PASO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

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## Play Safely in Pools and Recreational Water Frequently Asked Questions

**Due to budget cuts, the Health Department is unable to perform inspections of nearly 180 public swimming pools, spray parks, spas and swimming beaches related to recreational waters such as lakes. The following FAQs have been developed to assist the public with related concerns.**

**Please note:** Please supervise your children at all times in and around bodies of water, from buckets to bath tubs to pools and beaches. Drowning is a leading cause of accidental death among children.

**Q: What do we need to worry about in swimming pools? Doesn't the chlorine protect us?**

**A:** Properly chlorinated and filtrated pools can routinely kill most bacteria, including E. coli. Still, a number of germs can be transmitted by sick swimmers and cause waterborne illnesses in other pool patrons. The most common germ is cryptosporidium or "crypto," which is resistant to chlorine and accounts for the majority of recreational waterborne illness outbreaks in the United States.

**What can I do to protect myself and others from germs in recreational water?**

**A:** Practice prevention with these six tips:

- **Don't** swim when you have diarrhea. You can spread germs in the water and make other people sick.
- **Don't** swallow the pool water. Avoid getting water in your mouth.
- **Do** 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.
- **Do** take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often. Waiting to hear "I have to go" may mean that it's too late.
- **Do** change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area and not at poolside. Germs can spread in and around the pool.
- **Do** wash your child thoroughly (especially the bottom) with soap and water before swimming. Otherwise, invisible amounts of fecal matter can end up in the pool.

**Q: What about lakes and other natural bodies of water?**

**A:** Lakes, creeks and other natural bodies of water may contain germs, parasites and pollutants from many sources, including trash, runoff from rain, animal or human waste, sewer/septic waste and more. People who swim, wade, boat or come into contact with these waters could become sick and have symptoms such as diarrhea, vomiting, fever, sneezing, coughing and other symptoms. In addition to the same precautions associated with pools and spray parks, it's best to:

- Avoid swimming in a lake or natural body of water after a rainstorm.
- Avoid lakes and water that contain trash or other visible contaminants.
- Towel dry or shower and dry immediately after leaving the water.
- Do not attract wild birds (feeding them) in areas where people are swimming.
- With swimming beaches, check with operators about their safety practices.

**Q: What type of illness can you get from waterborne diseases?**

**A:** Symptoms of the illnesses people can get from pools, lakes and other recreational waters include gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic and wound infections. The most commonly reported illness related to recreational water is diarrhea.

**Q: How common are disease outbreaks related to recreational water?**

**A:** Consider these statistics:

- In the United States, 62 percent of recreational water illness outbreaks are associated with crypto.
- One incident of diarrhea can fully contaminate the largest pool or water park by introducing hundreds of millions of germs into the water. Many illnesses can be spread by swallowing just a few of these germs.
- About 38 percent of all aquatic illness outbreaks in the United States are caused by germs that can be eliminated with proper pool maintenance.

**For more information, visit: (links in parenthesis will not be visible to user)**

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/))
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment ([www.cdphe.state.co.us](http://www.cdphe.state.co.us))
- National Swimming Pool Foundation, ([www.nspf.org](http://www.nspf.org))