



## RECREATIONAL WATER ILLNESSES (RWI)

### What are Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs)?

RWIs are sicknesses caused by swallowing contaminated water. RWIs can be contracted in natural environments such as lakes, or through man-made structures such as swimming pools.

### What are the symptoms of RWIs?

The most commonly reported RWI symptom is diarrhea. RWIs can also cause nausea, vomiting, and a loss of appetite. Infections of the skin, ears, respiratory system, eyes, and wounds can also occur.

### How are RWIs spread?

If swimmers are ill with diarrhea, they can contaminate the water if they have an "accident" in the pool. When people are ill with diarrhea, their stool can contain millions of germs. As a result, if someone swallows water that has been contaminated with feces, he/she may become sick.

Many other RWIs are caused by germs that live naturally in the environment. In a pool or hot tub, if disinfectant is not maintained at appropriate levels, these germs can increase to the point where they cause illness when swimmers swallow the water.

### Why doesn't chlorine kill the germs?

Chlorine in swimming pools does kill the germs that make people sick, but it takes time. Chlorine in properly disinfected pools kills most germs that can cause RWIs in less than an hour. There is, however, a time period where these germs, even in well-maintained pools, can infect individuals with RWIs.

### How can I get more information?

For more information on RWIs or any other health issues, call the Sedgwick County Health Department at 660-7300. Or visit the Sedgwick County website at [www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org).

### How can I prevent RWIs?

Here are six steps from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that will help you prevent germs from causing illness at the pool:

- Don't swim when you have diarrhea. This is especially important for kids in diapers. You can spread germs into the water and make other people sick.
- Don't swallow pool water. In fact, try to avoid even having water get in your mouth.
- Practice good hygiene. Take a shower before swimming and wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet or after changing diapers. Germs on your body end up in the water.
- Take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often. Waiting to hear "I have to go" may mean that it's too late.
- Change diapers in a bathroom and not poolside. Germs can spread to surfaces and objects in and around the pool and spread illness.
- Wash your child thoroughly with soap and water before swimming. Everyone has invisible amounts of fecal matter on their bottoms that end up in the pool.



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