



WILLIAMSON COUNTY AND CITIES HEALTH DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Williamson County and Cities Health District Promotes Water Safety During National Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week

May 18, 2009 (Williamson County) –

The week before Memorial Day (May 18–24, 2009) has been designated as National Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week. The goal of this observance is to raise awareness about healthy swimming behaviors, including ways to prevent recreational water illnesses (RWIs) and injuries. RWIs are illnesses spread by swallowing, breathing in vapors of, or having contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, water parks, spas, interactive fountains, lakes, rivers, or oceans. Injuries at aquatics facilities can occur in or out of the water.

This year's RWI Prevention Week theme: pool chemical injuries

The theme for this year's RWI Prevention Week focuses on injuries associated with pool chemicals. Pool chemicals make the water where we swim safer by protecting us from germs; however, these same chemicals can also cause injuries if they are not properly handled. This type of preventable injury leads to thousands of emergency room visits each year. Public pool operators and residential pool owners can protect themselves and swimmers by taking these key steps:

- ALWAYS secure pool chemicals: Keep children and animals away.
- ALWAYS read product name and manufacturer's directions before each use.
- ALWAYS use appropriate protective gear, such as safety glasses and gloves, when handling pool chemicals.
- NEVER mix chlorine products with each other, acid, or other substances.

To access a complete set of prevention recommendations, visit www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/pdf/pool_chem_assoc_inj.pdf.

Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs)

The best way to prevent RWIs is to keep germs out of the pool in the first place. Everyone can help create healthy swimming experiences this summer by following these six healthy swimming steps:

- 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.

- Take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often.
- Change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area and not at poolside.
- Wash your children thoroughly (especially their bottom) with soap and water before they go swimming.

The most common RWI reported in Williamson County in 2008 was cryptosporidiosis. Cryptosporidiosis is a gastrointestinal illness caused by the parasite, *Cryptosporidium* (“Crypto”). During the 2008 Crypto outbreak in Williamson County, 138 Crypto cases were investigated and numerous pools were closed for a day to treat the pool water for Crypto. Crypto generally follows a seasonal pattern, with cases being reported from June through October. The most common symptom of Crypto is watery diarrhea. Other symptoms may include: dehydration, weight loss, stomach cramps or pain, fever, nausea, and vomiting. Healthy people with Crypto almost always get better without any treatment but treatment is available by prescription. An unusual feature of Crypto is that some people seem to get better only to have the diarrhea come back in a few days. Symptoms can come and go for up to 30 days, but usually subside in 1 to 2 weeks. Crypto can be a severe and prolonged disease in persons with weakened immune systems, such as those with AIDS or those taking drugs that suppress the immune system.

As part the 2009 April Pools Day event, the Williamson County and Cities Health District produced signs promoting safe swimming. These high quality metal signs are available to pool operators at cost for \$10 each. Call 512-943-3660 for more information.

For more information about healthy swimming, visit:

- CDC’s Healthy Swimming website at www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming
- The Environmental Protection Agency’s beaches website www.epa.gov/beaches

For information about safety and sanitation standards for pools in Texas, and for questions regarding the design or operation of swimming pools or spas, visit:
www.dshs.state.tx.us/poolspa.

For more information on Cryptosporidiosis and other recreational water illnesses in Williamson County visit *your public health department* at:
<http://www.wcchd.org/Services/DiseaseMgmt/DiseaseUpdates.htm>