

Is Your Swimming Pool Unhealthy?

(StatePoint) Unhealthy pools are more common than you may think. New research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) underscores the importance of protecting your family at the pool this summer.

The CDC reports a disturbing statistic: About one out of eight public pool inspections conducted in 13 states in 2008 resulted in pools being closed immediately due to serious code violations. The venues with the most disinfection violations were kiddie or wading pools and water play areas.

Improperly-chlorinated water puts swimmers at risk for recreational water illnesses like diarrhea and ear and skin infections. This summer, the CDC is encouraging all swimmers to be activists -- check your pool water and immediately report any problems to pool staff.

Test strips are a quick and easy way to measure if there is adequate chlorine to kill germs and if pH is in the proper range. Swimmers can take action to protect themselves with free pool test kits offered by the Water Quality & Health Council (WQHC) on its Web site at healthypools.org/freeteststrips.

“You can’t always trust your fellow swimmer to practice healthy swimming habits,” says Chris Wiant, Chair of the WQHC. “But what you can do is test the chlorine level and pH of the water to make sure your pool is properly treated, and immediately approach pool staff if it is not.”

Test strips are an easy way to check water and maintain healthy pools. When testing pool water, be sure the free chlorine level is between 1.0 and 4.0 parts per million

(ppm) and the pH registers between 7.2 and 7.8.

A recent survey by the WQHC found that one in five Americans urinate in the pool. Urine, as well as sweat and even sunscreen, contains nitrogen that eats up some of a pool’s free chlorine, making it less effective in fighting waterborne germs. To ensure on-the-spot protection, it’s important to regularly adjust a pool’s chlorine levels.

Young children, pregnant women and people with compromised immune systems are more susceptible to germs causing recreational water illnesses. These illnesses are on the rise. Between 2005 and 2006, 78 outbreaks were reported in 31 states -- the largest number ever in a two-year period. Close to 4,500 people were affected.

“Chlorine and pH are a key defense against germs that can make swimmers sick,” says Michele Hlavsa, Chief of the Healthy Swimming Program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “When you visit a public pool, you can test the water yourself to help ensure a healthy swimming experience.”

Are you swimming in an unhealthy pool? Use your senses to recognize the signs:

- CANNOT SEE the floor drain in the deep end of the pool.
- CANNOT HEAR the pool pump running.
- SMELL a strong chemical odor.
- FEEL sliminess on tile walls.

Free test kits are available from the WQHC at healthypools.org/freeteststrips. For more on preventing recreational water illnesses, visit the CDC at cdc.gov.