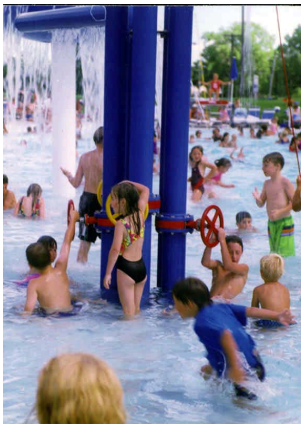
"Swimmer's Ear" (Otitis Externa)

Protection Against Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs)

www.healthyswimming.org

What is Swimmer's Ear?

Swimmer's Ear (ear ache) is an infection of the ear and/or outer ear canal. It can cause the ear to itch or become red and inflamed so that head movement or touching of the ear is very painful. Pus may also drain from the ear.



What causes Swimmer's Ear?

Swimmer's Ear is often caused by infection with a germ called *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*. This germ is common in the environment (soil, water) and is microscopic so that it can't be seen with the naked eye. Although all age groups are affected by Swimmer's Ear, it is more common in children and young adults and can be extremely painful.

How is Swimmer's Ear spread?

Having contaminated water get in the ear can give people Swimmer's Ear. Swimmer's Ear usually occurs within a few days of getting contaminated water or placing contaminated objects in the ear.

Is there a difference between a childhood middle ear infection and Swimmer's Ear?

Yes. Swimmer's Ear is not the same as the common childhood middle ear infection. If you can wiggle the outer ear without pain or discomfort then your ear infection is probably not Swimmer's Ear.

Can Swimmer's Ear be prevented?

Yes. Here are four Healthy Swimming tips for protection against Swimmer's Ear:

1) Dry your ears after swimming. If it is difficult to get water out of your ear, apply a few drops of an alcohol-based ear product into the ear. Ask a pharmacist at your local drugstore for this product.
2) Ask your pool manager about the chlorine and pH testing program at your pool. Pools and hot tubs with good chlorine and pH control are unlikely to spread Swimmer's Ear.
3) Pay attention to signage and avoid swimming in locations that have been closed because of pollution.
4) Avoid putting objects in the ear (e.g. fingers, cotton swabs) that may scratch the ear canal and provide a site for infection.

If you think you have Swimmer's Ear, consult your healthcare provider. Swimmer's Ear can be treated with antibiotic ear drops.