



Press Release

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Health Experts, Nongovernmental Leaders Begin First National Initiative to Promote Healthy Swimming

Responding to increasing outbreaks of illness associated with swimming venues, leaders from local, state, and federal public health institutions, the aquatics industry and nongovernmental groups convened in Atlanta recently to begin planning the first national, broad-based initiative to reduce and prevent recreational water illnesses associated with swimming pools, lakes and other natural water sources.

“The emergence of recreational water illnesses has demanded a public health response and we are pleased to see this unprecedented collaboration to address this growing threat,” said Dr. Michael Beach, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention water and healthy swimming expert. “Ingrained in the national psyche is the expectation of a healthy swimming experience. However, people need to keep in mind they share the water with everyone else in the pool who may spread illness, including kids in diapers.”

Recreational water illnesses can be caused by germs such as *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, [Shigella](#), and *E. coli* [O157:H7](#) that are spread by swallowing contaminated water -- water that appears to be clean but may harbor these infectious organisms. CDC asks swimmers to forego swimming when they have diarrhea, which can contaminate the water and lead other swimmers to become ill. In particular, parents of children in diapers are advised to keep their children out of the pool if they have diarrhea. CDC also recommends that swimmers refrain from getting pool water in their mouths and practice good hygiene by showering before swimming and washing their hands after visiting the restroom or changing diapers.

According to CDC’s most recent surveillance data, more than 2,500 people became ill during 65 water-related disease outbreaks from 23 states; however many cases go unreported. This represented the highest number of outbreaks and cases since reporting began in 1978, highlighting recreational water illnesses as a growing public health problem. Data is collected and reported as part of the national waterborne-disease outbreaks surveillance system maintained by the CDC, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists. This represents the primary source of data concerning the scope and effects of recreational water-related disease outbreaks in the United States.

“After a large-scale waterborne disease outbreak in my state, I recognized the urgent need for epidemiologists from across the nation to team up with all the needed players in preventing illness from recreational water venues,” said Dr. Gail Hansen, Acting Kansas State Epidemiologist and member of the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE). Dr. Hansen submitted a position statement to CSTE, asking CDC to respond to this increasing public health threat.

During the two-day workshop, the nearly 100 participants called for establishing a national dialogue on the risks and solutions for ensuring healthy swimming. Recommendations for a national strategic plan that will include improved training for public health officials and pool staff will be published in a CDC report this summer.

The first workshop focused on reducing illnesses associated with swimming pools, but the initiative will also eventually include lakes, rivers and other natural water sources. The national initiative to promote healthy swimming is co-sponsored by CDC and CSTE, with partners from state, local and non-profit organizations and aquatics industry leaders.

One distinguished participant, aquatics industry innovator and 1936 Olympic gold medalist Adolph Kiefer said, "I'm thrilled to be a part of this national effort to improve aquatics management practices and ensure that kids to elders have a good experience." At age 87, Kiefer still swims daily. "Everyone can be a swimmer for life!"

To learn more about healthy swimming, please visit www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming.

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