

Operating Swimming Pools

Quick Facts

The Issue

Preventing recreational waterborne illnesses (RWIs) and injuries is a multifaceted issue and a shared responsibility. Poor design, maintenance, operation, and use can result in inadequate disinfection, filtration, and circulation. This can result in physical hazards and allow the spread of a variety of germs that cause diarrhea as well as skin and respiratory RWIs.

Strategies to Reduce and Prevent Hazards

- **Be proactive**
 - Develop a facility-specific pool safety plan with the goal of identifying facility-specific hazards.
 - Carry out strategies and protocols to reduce risks. (See sample pool safety plan.)
- **Get educated and be available**
 - Make sure staff have received their certification in pool operation, have been trained in the facility's pool operation and the facility-specific pool safety plan, and have received chemical handling training.
 - Make sure trained operation staff are also available during weekends when swimming pools are used most.
- **Maintain proper water quality and adjust as necessary**
 - Maintain the appropriate free available disinfection (min. 1 mg/l non-stabilized) and pH (7.5) that are needed to maintain your facility's pool water.
 - Test disinfectant pH levels before opening and then throughout the day.
 - Test and record ORP, alkalinity, combined chlorine, cyanuric acid level (outdoor pool), temperature, and other necessary parameters as appropriate for the facility.
 - Make sure water clarity meets the black disc test.
 - Maintain accurate records of all water quality measurements and maintenance activities.
- **Develop and perform standard operating procedures**
 - Maintain filtration and recirculation systems according to manufacturer's recommendations. Include a check for any potential suction entrapment issues.
 - Enforce bather load limits.
 - Scrub pool surfaces to remove any slime layer (biofilm).
 - Drain and replace portions of the water on a weekly to monthly basis, depending on usage and water quality.
 - Institute a preventative maintenance program to clean and/or replace equipment or parts before they fail (e.g., feed pump tubing, injectors, sensor probes, first aid kits, and other lifesaving equipment).
 - Develop response procedures for fecal accidents and body fluid spills.
 - Develop employee policies for staff that are ill (e.g., diarrhea).
 - Develop a communication chain for reporting operation problems.
 - Make sure restrooms, showers, and diaper changing areas are clean and safe.
 - Make sure all chemicals are safely stored, handled, and are compatible with all other chemicals used for operating the pool and cleaning the facility.

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- **Educate pool users and parents about RWIs and appropriate pool use**
 - No one should go swimming when they are ill with diarrhea.
 - All swimmers should take a pre-swim cleansing shower and frequent bathroom breaks.
 - Carry out large group orientations, particularly for young children, and bathroom break policies to promote healthy swimming.
 - Diapers should be changed in the change room, not at the side of the pool. Wash hands after changing diapers.
 - Teach parents the pros and cons of swim diapers (e.g., they are not leak proof).

Swimming is fun! It's a great way to be physically active and to cool down during those hot days of summer. Let's work together to make all our swim experiences safe ones.