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HEALTHY AND SAFE SWIMMING WEEK: HOW CAN WE PREVENT RECREATIONAL WATER ILLNESSES (RWIs)?
MORGANTOWN, WV – MAY 19, 2016

Formerly known as Recreational Water Illness and Injury (RWII) Prevention Week, the week before Memorial Day has been designated National Healthy and Safe Swimming Week. Healthy and Safe Swimming Week 2016 will take place May 23-29, 2016, marking the 12th anniversary of this observance.

Each year, Healthy and Safe Swimming Week focuses on simple steps swimmers and pool operators can take to help ensure a healthy and safe swimming experience for everyone. It focuses on the role of swimmers, aquatics and beach staff, residential pool owners, and public health officials in preventing drowning, pool chemical injuries, and outbreaks of illnesses. It highlights swimmer hygiene and the need for swimmers to take an active role in helping to protect themselves and prevent the spread of germs. This year the Monongalia County Health Department is emphasizing CDC’s message to the public on how to prevent recreational water illnesses (RWIs).

Recreational water illnesses (RWIs) are caused by germs spread by swallowing, breathing in mists or aerosols of, or having contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, hot tubs, water parks, water play areas, interactive fountains, lakes, rivers, or oceans. RWIs can also be caused by chemicals in the water or chemicals that evaporate from the water and cause indoor air quality problems. Diarrhea is the most common RWI, and it is often caused by germs like Crypto (short for Cryptosporidium), Giardia, norovirus, Shigella, and E. coli O157:H7. Other common RWIs include skin, ear, respiratory, neurologic, and wound infections. Children, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems are most at risk for RWIs.

Here are a few easy and effective healthy swimming steps all swimmers can take each time we swim to help protect ourselves, our families, and our friends from recreational water illnesses (RWIs):

Keep the pee, poop, sweat, and dirt out of the water!

- Stay out of the water if you have diarrhea.
- Shower before you get in the water.
- Don’t pee or poop in the water.
- Don’t swallow the water.
Every hour—everyone out!

• Take kids on bathroom breaks.
• Check diapers, and change them in a bathroom or diaper-changing area—not poolside—to keep germs away from the pool.
• Reapply sunscreen.
• Drink plenty of fluids.

Check the free chlorine level and pH before getting into the water.

• Pools: Proper free chlorine level (1–3 mg/L or parts per million [ppm]) and pH (7.2–7.8) maximize germ-killing power.
• Hot tubs/spas: Proper disinfectant level (chlorine [2–4 parts per million or ppm] or bromine [4–6 ppm] and pH [7.2–7.8]) maximize germ-killing power.
• Most superstores, hardware stores, and pool-supply stores sell pool test strips.

To help keep swimming healthy and safe, all Recreational Water Facilities are inspected at least twice per year by the Health Department. This includes swimming pools, wading pools, hot tubs, bathing beaches, water parks, and any other public swimming areas. The Health Department also checks the chemistry (chlorine and pH) of all operating Recreational Water Facilities every 2 weeks. The Health Department conducts 4 types of inspections:

1. Routine: A regular inspection of the facility. This is a full inspection that assesses the entire facility and staff for the purpose of safety, sanitation, and compliance with the rules. These are unannounced (aka surprise) inspections.
2. Follow-up Inspection: An inspection to assess correction of specific violations that were noted during a routine, complaint, or opening inspection. These are typically scheduled since the facility is usually given a deadline (such as 10 days) to correct the violation(s.)
3. Complaint: An inspection of the facility to assess potential violations noted in a complaint that was received by the Health Department. All complaints are investigated within 10 days, with priority given to complaints about illness or injury. Complaints can be registered online at:  www.monchd.org/contact-environmental.html
4. Opening: An inspection of a new facility prior to opening or of a facility that has changed ownership to assess whether the facility qualifies for a permit. The assessment looks at whether the facility has been built/remodeled/upgraded according to the plans that they submitted to the Health Department and that the facility meets all current applicable West Virginia laws.

Inspection results can be viewed at:  www.healthspace.com/monongalia  For questions or more information about recreational water visit  www.monchd.org  or call 304-598-5100.

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