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Stay Safe and Healthy This Summer While Enjoying Recreational Water Activities

By *Chris J. Minnick*

(Las Cruces) -- As summer approaches and families head to swimming pools and lakes to escape the summer heat, the New Mexico Department of Health reminds residents to follow a few simple safety guidelines to avoid getting sick or drowning.

David Selvage, an epidemiologist for the Department of Health's Infectious Disease Epidemiology Bureau, said people can get sick with *Cryptosporidium* (crypto) and other organisms from swimming in recreational waters. Crypto is a parasite that can cause diarrhea in people and is the most common cause of recreational water associated illness in the United States.

"Germs on and in swimmers' bodies end up in the water and can make other people sick," Selvage said. "We want people to go out and enjoy our swimming facilities and lakes, but we also want people to understand they have a responsibility to keep themselves and others in our communities safe."

Symptoms of crypto include diarrhea, abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting and fever, and can begin one to 12 days after exposure. Symptoms often come and go, but can last for 30 days or more even in healthy people. The disease may last longer and can contribute to death in people with weak immune systems.

"The main thing we need people to do is stay out of the water if they have diarrhea and for two weeks after the symptoms have gone away," Selvage said. "People can continue to shed crypto even after diarrhea stops. For the safety of the entire community it's paramount that people remain out of the water while they are ill and for two weeks after diarrhea ends. People must also be diligent about showering well with soap and water before swimming."

In 2008 the Department of Health, New Mexico Environment Department, the City of Albuquerque and the Bernalillo County Environment Department investigated a large outbreak of crypto involving 91 infected people and multiple swimming pools in Bernalillo, Sandoval and San Juan counties. The Department of Health and the Environment Department have distributed posters and other information to pool operators around the state that provide prevention guidelines.

To prevent illnesses, the Department of Health recommends the following guidelines:

- Do not swim when you have diarrhea or for two weeks after diarrhea stops.

- Do not swallow pool water or get pool water or other types of untreated water, such as lake water or river water, in your mouth.
- Shower well with soap and water, particularly all areas below the waist and above the knees, before swimming.
- Wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Take children on bathroom breaks and change diapers often away from the pool.
- Change children's diapers in a bathroom, not at poolside.
- Shower off and towel dry after getting out of lakes and rivers to avoid rashes.
- Bathe and wipe down pets that have jumped or played in recreational waters.

Danois Montoya, natatorium manager at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, said in addition to following the good hygiene guidelines, people visiting pools and lakes should also be aware of safety procedures to prevent drowning.

“A drowning can happen in an instant so parents should never leave their children unattended for even a second,” Montoya said. “I recommend that parents enroll their children in a swimming or water safety class at the earliest age possible. Kids need to learn the basics of flotation and how to react to potential hazards while in the water.”

Montoya said parents should become familiar with where lifesaving and rescue equipment is located, especially at pools that are not attended by a lifeguard. Private homes and hotel pools generally do not have lifeguards and parents must take extra precautions.

To learn more about healthy swimming habits, visit the New Mexico Department of Health recreational water safety website at <http://www.healthyswimmingnm.org>.

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