



Is Cryptosporidium Lurking at Your Public Pool?

Story by Mike Flenniken

Going to a water park, community pool, or other public aquatic facility this summer? Make sure not to swallow any water.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released a study that found the number of outbreaks of Cryptosporidium, a parasite that can be spread when people swallow even a mouthful of water that has been contaminated by someone suffering from diarrhea, had doubled from 2014 to 2016.

According to the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, at least 32 Crypto outbreaks were reported in 2016, compared to 16 in 2014. The report said it was unclear whether to attribute the increase to more outbreaks or better detection as a result of improved surveillance and laboratory methods.

"The way we're diagnosing Cryptosporidiosis now has changed, and perhaps we're picking

up more cases than we would have before, said Michele Hlavsa, chief of the CDC's Health Swimming program. "Therefore because we're picking up more cases in it and then interviewing more patients, we're making connections between the patients better and picking up more outbreaks."

Hlavsa, who has an infant and a 2-year-old son, said they go swimming every weekend. She makes sure he takes a shower beforehand and constantly reminds him not to drink the water.

"It is tough, but our message to parents is stick with it, and for example not to bring toys into the pool that encourage drinking the water," she said. "It's not about not swimming; that's definitely not the message of these reports whether it's the inspection data or the outbreaks; it's about being smarter and healthier when we do it."

The CDC recommends taking the following precautions to help protect yourself and others from germs that cause diarrhea:

- Don't swim or let your kids swim if sick from diarrhea.
 - If diarrhea is caused by Crypto, wait until two weeks after diarrhea has stopped to go swimming.
- Don't swallow the water in which you swim.
- Rinse off in the shower before getting in the water to help remove any germs on your body that could contaminate the water.
- Take kids on bathroom breaks often, and check diapers in a diaper-changing area — not right next to the pool.

As for what facilities can do to mitigate the threat of an outbreak, Hlavsa said the CDC recommends that operators get training.

"I think oftentimes we underestimate how complex it is to run an aquatic venue with all the chemicals that need to go in, all the equipment that's used, and all the things that are going around continuously," she said, "and how one thing can change another parameter, and everything needs to be adjusted accordingly; it's pretty complex."

Training the operators is important, she said, but there also needs to be a focus on making sure Crypto isn't introduced to the water.

"Swimmers are bringing the *Cryptosporidium* into the water, so it's about keeping it out of the water in the first place," she said, "telling about not swimming or letting kids swim if they're sick with diarrhea; about not swallowing the water."

Hlavsa said facility operators need to work with public health inspectors to learn what's going on in the community. The inspector will likely know of any outbreaks, she said, so it's important step up precautionary measures if there is one going on.

"It's about engaging all the stakeholders," she said. "Our main stakeholders in healthy swimming are public health, the aquatic sector, and swimmers, and it's all three of us working together that are going to prevent these outbreaks from happening."



A recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report found that the number of outbreaks of *Cryptosporidium* doubled from 2014 to 2016.

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Hlavsa equated taking such steps with the need to use seat belts in a car and wearing a helmet when on a bicycle.

"This is about being smarter about swimming so you can enjoy the summer with your family," she said. "*Cryptosporidium*, the parasite that causes *Cryptosporidiosis*, can cause diarrhea that lasts up to two to three weeks. That's a long time, and nobody wants to spend their summer like that." 📸