



## Diarrhea and Swimming

---

Diarrhea and swimming don't mix! Diarrhea is the most common recreational water illness (RWI). Swimmers who are sick with diarrhea—or who have been sick in the last two weeks—risk contaminating pool water with germs. Certain germs that cause diarrhea can live from minutes to days in pools, even if the pool is well-maintained. Once the pool has been contaminated, all it takes is for someone to swallow a small amount of pool water to become infected.

### Diarrhea and Spreading Illness at the Pool

Infectious diarrhea can contain anywhere from hundreds of millions to one billion germs per bowel movement. Swallowing even a small amount of water that has been contaminated with these germs can make you sick. Tiny amounts of fecal matter are rinsed off all swimmers' bottoms as they swim through the water. That is why it is so important to stay out of the pool if you are sick with diarrhea, shower before swimming, and avoid swallowing pool water.

At public swimming facilities, continuous filtration and disinfection of water should reduce the risk of spreading germs. However, swimmers may still be exposed to germs during the time it takes for chlorine to kill germs (certain germs take longer to kill than others) or for water to be recycled through filters. Many pool facilities use one filtration system for several pools. This causes water from various pools to mix and potentially spreads germs throughout connected pools in a very short amount of time. This means that a single diarrheal incident from one person could contaminate water throughout a large pool system or waterpark.

### What to Do if You Have Diarrhea

To help protect the health of others, **do not swim when you have diarrhea**. Microscopic amounts of infected fecal matter can contaminate an entire pool or hot tub and make others sick if they swallow the water.

If you have diarrhea, the most important thing you can do is to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. This is especially important for young children, pregnant women, and persons with weakened immune systems (such as those living with HIV/AIDS, those who have received an organ transplant, or those receiving certain types of chemotherapy).

**Seek medical care immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:**

- your diarrhea is bloody
- your diarrhea does not resolve in 5 days
- your diarrhea is accompanied by fever or chills
- you are dehydrated (Signs of dehydration include: dry or "cottony" mouth, cracked lips, dry flushed skin, headache, irritability, not urinating at least four times a day, no tears when crying, not sweating, or confusion)