



ALBEMARLE REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES
Partners in Public Health

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ALBEMARLE REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES REMINDS COMMUNITY MEMBERS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTING RECREATIONAL WATER RELATED ILLNESSES.

Elizabeth City, NC – Recreational Water Related Illnesses (RWIs) are caused by germs or chemicals found in water bodies such as swimming pools, hot tubs, lakes, rivers, estuaries and oceans. Vibrio infections, E.coli - shiga toxin, Shigellosis, and Cryptosporidiosis are all Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs). These illnesses are more common in summer. RWIs are infections that can be contracted by swallowing, breathing in, or having contact with contaminated water. The most common types of RWIs include gastrointestinal illnesses, skin infections, respiratory infections, and ear infections. These illnesses can be caused by various pathogens, including bacteria, viruses, and parasites.

Children, pregnant women, and people who have health problems or take medicines that lower their body's ability to fight germs and sickness—such as people whose immune systems are weakened because of cancer, an organ transplant, or HIV—are most at risk for RWIs.

Safety Tips for Preventing RWIs:

- 1. Don't swim if you're sick.** If you have diarrhea or any other contagious illness, avoid swimming or entering any recreational water facilities. This will help prevent the contamination of water and the spread of germs.
- 2. Don't swim if you have a compromised immune system or open wounds.** People with weakened immune systems should consult their healthcare provider before participating in recreational water activities, such as swimming. Open wounds such as cuts, scrapes, and recent tattoos can leave you more susceptible to illness. If you have a wound, including from a recent surgery, piercing, or tattoo, stay out of salt or brackish water, if possible. This includes wading at the beach. Cover your wounds with a waterproof bandage if it could come into contact with salt water, brackish water, or raw or undercooked seafood and its juices. Promptly tend to any wounds, cuts or abrasions you get while in or near the water. Thoroughly wash the wound with clean, drinkable water and soap.
- 3. Shower before swimming. Take a quick shower with soap and water before entering the water.** This helps remove any germs or contaminants on your body, reducing the risk of spreading them into the water.
- 4. Don't swallow the water.** Avoid swallowing water while swimming or participating in water activities. Ingesting even a small amount of contaminated water can lead to illness.

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5. **Use proper hygiene practices.** Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the restroom or changing diapers. This is crucial in preventing the spread of germs to others and reducing the risk of contamination.

6. **Change diapers in designated areas.** If you have young children who wear diapers, change them in designated diaper-changing areas and not near the water. Dispose of diapers properly to prevent contamination.

7. **Keep water clean.** If you own a pool or hot tub, maintain proper water chemistry and filtration systems. Regularly test the water and ensure it meets the recommended standards. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and maintaining your pool or hot tub.

8. **Avoid swimming in high risk areas or situations.** Heavy rainfalls can wash contaminants into recreational water bodies, increasing the risk of RWIs. Wait at least 24-48 hours after heavy rainfall before swimming to allow the water to clear. Avoid swimming near ocean outfalls at all times. Marine or ocean outfalls discharge wastewater, stormwater, and other potentially contaminated waters to the sea.

9. **Stay informed.** Check for any local advisories or warnings regarding water quality before swimming or participating in water activities. Stay updated on any closures or restrictions in your area. Further information regarding advisories may be obtained from North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) by visiting their NC Recreational Water Quality Swimming Advisory Map or signing up to receive NCDEQ press releases on their Water Quality Swimming Advisories page.

10. **Teach children about water safety.** Educate children about the importance of not swallowing water, using proper hygiene practices, and following safety rules while swimming or playing in water.

11. **Report any water quality concerns.** If you notice any issues with water quality or suspect an outbreak of RWIs, report it to the appropriate authorities, such as North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, your local health department and/or pool operators.

12. **Seek medical care if you become ill.** If you get cut while in the sound or ocean, seek a doctor's care if you become ill, a rash or swelling develops around the wound, or it appears infected.

It is important to understand how to prevent RWIs. By following these safety tips, you can reduce your risk of infection and ensure a safe and enjoyable experience in recreational water.

For more information on Health Water and Recreational Water Illnesses can be found here:

Center for Disease Control - [Healthy Water | CDC](#)

To report water quality issues click here: North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality [Emergency Response | NC DEQ](#)

For more information, please contact Amy Underhill, ARHS Public Information Officer at 252-338-4448 or aunderhill@arhs-nc.org. Albemarle Regional Health Services is dedicated to disease prevention and the promotion of a healthy environment to reduce morbidity, mortality, and disability through quality service, education, and advocacy.

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