

# Wellness report

## Backyard pools

### Creatures from the blue lagoon

There's no mistaking the telltale signs of summer. Patio sets and lawn furniture begin their annual migration into backyards, while hammocks return to their nesting grounds between strategically spaced trees. Early on weekend mornings, bags of garden fertilizer and loads of topsoil can be spotted on driveways. And in many backyards across the country, covers come off pools, filters cough and sputter back to life and kids start testing the water with their toes.

On a sweltering summer day, there's nothing quite as refreshing as a dip in the pool. But before you dive right in, there are a few things to keep in mind regarding water quality and "recreational water illnesses."

### Healthy swimming behaviours

Recreational water illnesses (RWIs) are caused by a nasty little group of microscopic critters called *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, *Shigella* and *E. coli* 0157:H7. On their own or in combination, these are not the kind of guests you want to crash your next pool party.

It's not a topic for discussion around the dinner table, but RWIs are spread when a person swallows water contaminated by fecal matter. As unpleasant as that sounds, it can actually happen quite easily. All it takes is one person who's suffering from a diarrheal illness

to use the pool and inadvertently cause contamination, thereby putting everyone using the pool at risk of infection and illness.

Although the germs in question are killed by chlorine, some are resistant and capable of surviving in swimming pools for days, meaning that even a well-maintained (and clean looking) pool can be the source of sickness. Fortunately, RWIs can be controlled through awareness and the enforcement of a few healthy swimming behaviours designed to reduce the chance of contamination occurring.

### The "pleas" for healthy swimming

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have developed six "pleas" to help reduce the danger of RWIs. Share these rules with your family and guests when using backyard or public pools.

#### Pleas for swimmers

Please don't swim if you have an intestinal illness (diarrhea). This is especially important for children in diapers. You can spread germs into the water and make other people sick.

Please don't swallow the pool water. In fact, try your best to avoid allowing water to get in your mouth.

Please wash your hands with soap and water after using the washroom or changing diapers. Always be aware that germs that start off on your body end up in the water.



## Pleas for parents with young children

Please take your children for washroom breaks often. Waiting to hear “I have to go!” may mean it’s already too late.

Please change diapers in a changeroom and not at poolside. Germs can spread to surfaces and objects in and around the pool and spread illness.

Please wash your child thoroughly (especially your child’s bottom) with soap and water before swimming. We all have invisible amounts of fecal matter on our bodies that end up in the pool.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Web site [www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming)

## Not just pools, and not just people

Recreational Water Illnesses can also be contracted from hot tubs, whirlpools, water parks, public beaches, recreational fountains and spray pads. In addition, RWIs can be transmitted from animals to humans, giving pool owners another good reason to keep the family pets away from the pool area. The same is true in the great outdoors where wilderness campers and canoeists risk catching giardia (affectionately known as Beaver Fever) if they drink untreated water from lakes, rivers and streams. In the wild, there are a number of effective methods to make water suitable for human consumption including portable filtration, boiling (minimum five minutes) and chemical disinfection.

## Swim Safe

No discussion of backyard pools is complete without including a few safety reminders regarding drownings, spinal injuries and other accidents. Children are most at risk for drowning so there’s absolutely no substitute for constant adult supervision. The Royal Life Saving Society of Canada says that drowning takes only seconds to occur and, contrary to what many people believe, victims are rarely able to call or signal for help. For this reason, you must have swimmers in continuous eye contact when supervising the pool, and if you’re not physically in the pool with them,

children should always wear a properly fitting lifejacket or personal flotation device.

If you’ve invested in a pool, you should also invest some time in becoming skilled and knowledgeable in life saving, water rescue and CPR. Ensure you have all the proper poolside safety equipment and, just as importantly, make sure you know how to use it. Take a course and practise an action plan with your family so that if an emergency occurs, you know what to do. Install a self-closing, self-latching gate to prevent entry to the pool area by toddlers, children and pets. Make sure your pool meets the local regulations regarding fencing and access.

### The Canadian Red Cross Society recommends the following poolside safety equipment:

- throwing line with buoyant aid (such as a life preserver ring)
- non-metal pole for reaching
- first-aid kit
- telephone with emergency phone numbers as well as the pool’s address and phone number.

## Feet first

Never dive into unknown waters. It’s a simple but vitally important message to impress upon loved ones. The Canadian Red Cross Society says almost all diving accidents in backyard pools involve young men, aged 15 to 25, who are visitors to the pool. Most spinal injuries occur on a victim’s first dive, in water less than five feet deep. In truth, many pools (as well as lakes and rivers) aren’t safe for diving at all, so feet first entries should be enforced. The United States Lifesaving Association recommends teaching children to always “stop, watch and walk into the water.” If you do allow diving or sliding, you need to make sure there’s sufficient depth for the entire path of entry. A floating safety line marking “deep” and “shallow” sections and clearly marked depths are required, and pool owners need to carefully explain proper entry techniques and house rules to all visitors.

Just about everybody looks forward to the chance to enjoy a refreshing swim, and days by the pool or at the beach form many of our fondest summertime memories. But when

Since 1946, more than 27 million Canadians of every age have learned to swim and safely enjoy water activities through the programs of the Canadian Red Cross Water Safety Services. The Red Cross also offers advice on backyard pool safety checks. For more information, visit [www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)

water’s involved, there’s no room to let your guard down. Make it your mission to obtain the knowledge, awareness and training necessary to ensure many fun-filled, water soaked days for yourself, your family and your loved ones.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control, the Canadian Red Cross Society, the Royal Life Saving Society of Canada, the United States Lifesaving Association and the National Safety Council.

### Please Note:

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