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Enjoy the Water but Be Safe
2009 National Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week

The week before Memorial Day (May 18–24, 2009) has been designated as National Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week. Central District Health (District 4) and Southwest District Health (District 3) are combining efforts to raise awareness about healthy swimming behaviors, including ways to prevent recreational water illnesses (RWIs) and injuries. RWIs are illnesses spread by swallowing, breathing in vapors of, or having contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, water parks, spas, interactive fountains, lakes, rivers, or oceans. Injuries at aquatics facilities can occur in or out of the water.

Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs)

In 2007 the state of Idaho had 517 confirmed cases of cryptosporidiosis (crypto). But last year the number dropped to 72, due in large part to efforts by the state's seven health districts to help pool operators identify and correct weaknesses in their filtration systems and disinfection practices. A successful public awareness campaign was also launched by Idaho State Health & Welfare. Building on that success, the health districts of the Treasure Valley are working together to protect recreational water users.

Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by a tiny parasite associated with swimming in recreational waters contaminated with human stool or animal waste, usually in amounts too small to be seen.

The best way to prevent RWIs is to keep germs out of the pool in the first place. Everyone can help create healthy swimming experiences this summer by following these six healthy swimming steps:

- PLEASE don't swim when you have diarrhea.
- PLEASE don't swallow pool water.
- PLEASE practice good hygiene. Shower with soap before swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- PLEASE take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often.
- PLEASE change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area and not at poolside.
- PLEASE wash your children thoroughly (especially the rear end) with soap and water before they go swimming.

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RWI Prevention Week Expands Focus to Include Pool Chemical Injuries

Having raised awareness of healthy swimming practices last year, health departments across the country are now focusing on injuries associated with pool chemicals. Pool chemicals make the water where we swim safer by protecting us from germs; however, these same chemicals can also cause injuries if they are not properly handled. This type of preventable injury leads to thousands of emergency room visits each year. Public pool operators and residential pool owners can protect themselves and swimmers by taking these key steps:

- ALWAYS secure pool chemicals: Keep children and animals away.
- ALWAYS read product name and manufacturer's directions before each use.
- ALWAYS use appropriate protective gear, such as safety glasses and gloves, when handling pool chemicals.
- NEVER mix chlorine products with each other, acid, or other substances.

To access a complete set of prevention recommendations, visit www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/pdf/pool_chem_assoc_inj.pdf.

Resources:

Central District Health Department website:
<http://cdhd.idaho.gov/EH/pools/resources.htm>

Southwest District Health Department website:
<http://www.publichealthidaho.com/public-swimming-pools.asp>

CDC Healthy Swimming website:
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/index.htm>