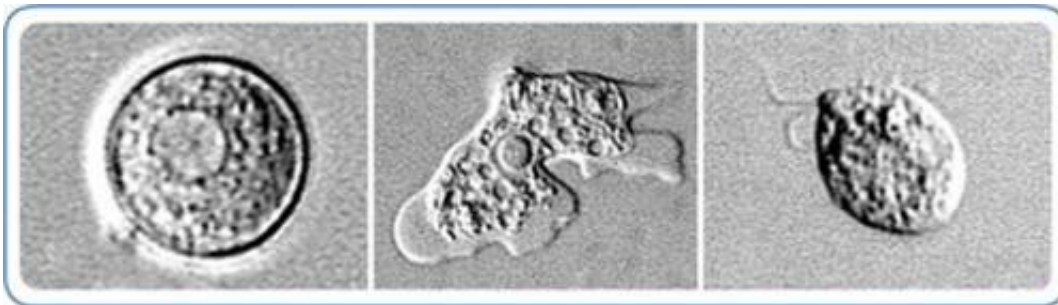


# Brain-eating amoeba rattles nerves in Louisiana

September 20 2013, by Janet Mcconnaughey

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This combo of images provided by the Center for Disease Control shows the *Naegleria fowleri* amoeba in the cyst stage, left, trophozoite stage, center and the flagellated stage, right. The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals on Thursday tried to dispel common "myths and rumors" about the amoeba *Naegleria fowleri* -- starting with the notion that the parish water isn't safe to drink. Meanwhile, the parish held a public meeting about its water Thursday night Sept. 19, 2013. (AP Photo/Center For Disease Control)

Bottled water sales have skyrocketed while officials try to pin down the source of a deadly amoeba found in the water supply of St. Bernard Parish, and some people worry about washing their faces in the shower.

That's despite experts who say the only danger is to people who manage to get the [microscopic organism](#) way up their noses. Its only entry to the brain is through minute openings in a bone about level with the top of the eyeball, said Dr. Raoult Ratard, Louisiana's state epidemiologist.

But belief comes hard to many people. "As far as taking a bath or shower, you got no other choice," said Debbie Sciortino. "But I ain't drinking it, I ain't giving it to the dogs and I ain't cooking with it either."

The state Department of Health and Hospitals on Thursday tried to dispel common "myths and rumors" about the amoeba *Naegleria fowleri* (nuh-GLLEE-ree-uh FOW-ler-eye)—starting with the notion that the parish [water](#) isn't safe to drink. Meanwhile, the parish held a public meeting about its water Thursday night.

The worries began Sept. 12, when the state health department reported that water in the Violet and Arabi communities outside New Orleans tested positive for the amoeba that killed a 4-year-old Mississippi boy in August after he visited St. Bernard Parish.

Jonathan Yoder, an epidemiologist in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's [waterborne disease](#) prevention branch, said *Naegleria* has never before been found in water treated by a U.S. water system.

There have been 132 documented infections from the amoeba since 1962, almost all of them fatal, health officials say.

Both of Louisiana's 2011 infections were of people who used tap water to flush out their sinuses. However, each of the earlier cases, Yoder said the amoeba was found in the house's hot water system but not in either municipal water or water coming from the home's cold water tap.

But still people worry.

"Nobody's washing their faces in the showers anymore. Nobody's drinking the water," Angela Miller of Violet said during a break Thursday outside the Chalmette hair salon where she works. "My neighbor has a pool that they have emptied. And they have no water in

there now until this matter is cleared up."

That's not necessary, experts say. Stomach acids, boiling and chlorine all will kill the amoeba.

Many people think water should test free of the amoeba before they use it, DHH said, but testing tap water for the [amoeba](#) is not as important as making sure that it holds enough chlorine to kill the creature.

Last Friday—the latest available report—there was no detectable free chlorine in water mains and other testing stations along nearly two-thirds the length of the long, narrow parish.

To get the recommended level of one-half part chlorine per million at the system's outer reaches, the parish has been putting about eight times that amount into the water at its treatment plant, said Jake Causey, chief engineer for the state Office of Public Health's engineering services section.

Investigators may never know just how Naegleria got into the pipes.

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