

Study highlights risk of norovirus from swimming

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Credit: Wikipedia.

Simple tips can help swimmers stay safe in various swimming venues.

When most people think of norovirus, they think of people marooned on a cruise ship with raging stomach and intestinal illness, unable to leave their cabins. However, an outbreak at an Oregon lake underscores that

swimming can also put the public at risk of catching the ugly bug. Fortunately, following a few easy and effective steps can help maximize the health benefits of swimming while minimizing the risk of getting sick.

In honor of Healthy and Safe Swimming week, experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local and state health officials in Oregon report today on a summer 2014 outbreak that spread via [swimming](#) in a contaminated lake.

The [norovirus outbreak](#) in July 2014 linked to a lake near Portland, Oregon sickened 70 people. Those who swam in the lake were 2.3 times more likely to develop vomiting or diarrhea than those who visited the park but didn't go in the [water](#). More than half of those who got ill were children between 4–10 years old. Experts believe the outbreak began after a swimmer infected with norovirus had diarrhea or vomited in the water and other swimmers swallowed the [contaminated water](#). To prevent other people from getting sick, park officials closed the lake to swimmers for 10 days.

"Children are prime targets for [norovirus](#) and other germs that can live in lakes and [swimming pools](#) because they're so much more likely to get the water in their mouths," said Michael Beach, Ph.D, CDC's associate director for healthy water. "Keeping germs out of the water in the first place is key to keeping everyone healthy and helping to keep the places we swim open all summer."

Swimmers can help protect themselves, their families and friends by following a few easy and effective steps:

Keep the pee, poop, sweat, and dirt out of the water!

- Don't swim if you have diarrhea or have been vomiting

- Shower before you get in the water
- Don't pee or poop in the water
- Don't swallow lake or pool water

Every hour—everyone out!

- Take kids on bathroom breaks
- Check diapers, and change them in a bathroom or diaper-changing area—to keep germs away from the water.

Norovirus was the second-leading cause of outbreaks in untreated recreational water, such as lakes, from 1978-2010. Norovirus can live in water for several months or possibly even years. Swimming venues that are not treated with chlorine can pose a particular risk since there are no chemicals to kill the stomach virus.

May 18–24, 2015, marks the 11th annual [Healthy and Safe Swimming Week](#) (formerly known as Recreational Water Illness and Injury Prevention Week). This observance highlights ways in which [swimmers](#), parents, pool owners and operators, beach managers, and public health can maximize the [health benefits](#) of water-based physical activity, while minimizing the risk of recreational water–associated illness and injury.

More information: A free downloadable brochure and more tips about staying healthy and safe while enjoying pools and lakes this summer is available at CDC's Healthy Swimming [site](#).

Provided by CDC

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