



LIFESAVING SOCIETY®

The Lifeguarding Experts

Pool Contamination - No Laughing Matter

Over the last year many Canadians learned how much we have taken for granted about the quality of our drinking water. The Walkerton E-coli tragedy and the North Battleford cryptosporidium (crypto) outbreak have shaken our faith and forced many people to learn more about the treatment of our water.

In 2001 these concerns made the news in Alberta when 3 swimming pools were closed as a result of cryptosporidium contamination. For many Albertans and pool managers this was their first exposure to the problem crypto poses for public swimming pools. These Alberta incidents were not the first time that crypto infections were traced to public pools in North America. In recent years, outbreaks were connected to a pool in Maple Ridge, BC as well as public pools in the United States.

These incidents have resulted in greater awareness and concern about the risks of pool contamination incidents by our customers. They have also resulted in more information being made available to the public and aquatic facility owners and operators. This Spring the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta launched a website dedicated to providing education about recreational water illnesses. The website address is www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming.

The CDC website contains educational material targeted at the general public as well as more technical resources specifically for the professional pool operator. Of particular interest and value is the article: "Notice to Readers: Responding to Fecal Accidents in Disinfected Swimming Venues". This article provides detailed protocols for dealing with 2 different types of fecal contamination incidents: formed stool vs. diarrhea. The Lifesaving Society recommends that every owner and operator of a public aquatic facility be familiar with these protocols and develop operating practices to deal with a pool fouling incident.

In addition to developing practices to manage an incident, aquatic facilities need to consider how they can prevent or minimize the effects of a fouling incident. Prevention strategies may include:

- restricting potentially incontinent customers such as infants to only one tank such as a teach pool to minimize the number of pool tanks that might become infected
- designing new aquatic facilities with separate teach pools
- requiring infants to wear a cloth or pool diaper covered by an impermeable pant with closures that seal around the leg and waist openings
- installing diaper change tables in the changerooms and implementing appropriate disinfection practices
- educating customers about the value of cleansing showers
- advising customers who have experienced diarrhea to stay away from the pool until they are no longer ill

- educating customers about the value of informing the pool staff if they have an accident in the pool
- teaching lifeguards and instructor about the risks of fouling incidents and their role in preventing and recognizing these incidents

Recent events have demonstrated that exposure to recreational water illnesses can have serious and even fatal consequences for the customers and staff of aquatic facilities. Every facility should develop risk management practices to deal with the risks of pool fouling incidents.

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