BE SAFE IN RECREATIONAL WATERS - HEAVY RAINS OR FLOODING MAY CAUSE RECREATIONAL WATER ILLNESSES (RWIS)

The Arkansas Department of Health regularly tests water in recreational swim areas around the state and is sometimes forced to close swim areas when water tests show that levels of bacteria make swimming unsafe. According to Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) Environmental Health Branch Chief Terry Paul, heaving rains or flooding can cause recreational water illnesses (RWIs). "The Health Department routinely monitors the levels of bacteria in the water at 146 swim beaches on lakes, rivers and streams in Arkansas, and it's not uncommon to find that some of them just aren't safe after heavy rains because the naturally occurring bacteria in the soil gets washed into the water," Paul said. "Usually things settle down after a day or two, and folks can get back in the water." Two consecutive days of safe water tests are required before the local county Environmental Health Specialist can re-open the beach.

Bacteria like E. coli (Escherichia coli) occur naturally in the soil, and can cause diarrhea or other RWIs if they are ingested. RWIs are caused by germs spread by swallowing, breathing in mists or aerosols of, or having contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, hot tubs, water parks, water play areas, interactive fountains, lakes, rivers or oceans.

RWIs can cause a wide variety of infections, including gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic and wound infections. The most commonly reported RWI is diarrhea. Diarrheal illnesses can be caused by germs such as Crypto (short for Crytosporidium), Giardia, Shigella, norovirus and E. coli. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the past two decades, there has been an increase in the number of RWI outbreaks associated with swimming.

The chlorine used in swimming pools, hot tubs and other water venues kills germs that cause RWIs, but chlorine doesn't work right away. It takes time to kill germs, and some (like Cryptosporidium or "Crypto") can live in properly chlorinated pools for days.
Swimmers have an essential role in helping to protect themselves, their families and others from RWIs. Follow the steps below to ensure that your swimming experience is healthy, and RWI-free!

Three Steps for All Swimmers

Keep germs from causing RWIs:

- Don't swim when you have diarrhea. You can spread germs in the water and make other people sick.
- Don't swallow the pool or lake water. Avoid getting water in your mouth.
- Practice good hygiene. Shower with soap before swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Germs on your body end up in the water.

Three Steps for Parents of Young Kids

Keep germs out of the pool:

- Take your kids on bathroom breaks or check diapers often. Waiting to hear "I have to go" may mean that it's too late.
- Change diapers in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area and not at poolside. Germs can spread in and around the pool.
- Wash your child thoroughly (especially the rear end) with soap and water before swimming. Invisible amounts of fecal matter can end up in the pool.

For information about swim beaches in Arkansas, go to the Arkansas Department of Health's website, at ***www.healthy.arkansas.gov*** or call toll-free at ***1-800-462-0599*** or for more information on healthy swimming go to the CDC's website at ***http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/***

Arkansas Department of Health
Keeping Your Hometown Healthy