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Recreational Water Illnesses



Language: English (US) ☐

Recreational Water Illness (noun):



Illness caused by germs and chemicals found in the water we swim in.

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Recreational water illnesses (RWIs) are caused by germs and chemicals found in the water we swim in. They are 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 also be caused by chemicals in the water or chemicals that turn into gas in the air and cause air quality problems at indoor aquatic facilities.

Knowing the basic facts about RWIs can make the difference between an enjoyable time at the pool, beach, or waterpark, and getting a rash, having diarrhea, or developing other, potentially serious illnesses.

Facts About Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs)

☐ What are RWIs?

Recreational water illnesses (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 also be caused by chemicals in the water or chemicals that evaporate from the water and cause indoor air quality problems.

RWIs can be 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 [Cryptosporidium](#)), [Giardia](#), [Shigella](#), [norovirus](#), and [E. coli O157:H7](#).

For promotional materials on recreational water illnesses, including brochures, posters, and educational materials, visit the [Health Promotion Materials](#) page.

- ☐ **Why should we be interested in RWIs?**
- ☐ **Where are RWIs found?**
- ☐ **How are RWIs spread?**
- ☐ **Why doesn't chlorine kill RWI germs?**
- ☐ **Who is most likely to get ill from an RWI?**
- ☐ **How can we prevent RWIs?**
- ☐ **What are the top causes of all RWI outbreaks?**

Specific RWI Infections

RWIs include a wide variety of infections. Learn in more detail about these infections on the following pages.

- [Diarrheal Illness](#)
 - [Rashes](#)
 - [Ear Infections](#)
 - [Respiratory Infections](#)
 - [Chemical Irritation of the Eyes and Lungs](#)
 - [Infections Unlikely to be Spread Through Swimming Pools](#)
- [Healthy Water](#)
 - [Drinking Water](#)
 - [Healthy Swimming](#)
 - [Global WASH](#)
 - [Other Uses of Water](#)
 - [WASH-related Emergencies & Outbreaks](#)
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