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**What's Scariest than a Giant Shark? Contaminated Water and Toxic Pool Disinfectants**  
*Nation's oldest poison center offers pool safety tips for fun in the sun this summer*

While the iconic music from the 1975 film *Jaws* may strike fear into the hearts of swimmers everywhere, what's lurking in your neighborhood pool can be just as scary as anything broadcast during the Discovery Channel's Shark Week (July 28-Aug. 4).

"Anyone who swims in pools, hot tubs, water parks, or any other water contaminated with germs is at risk for a recreational water illness (RWI)," says Michael Wahl, M.D., medical director, Illinois Poison Center (IPC). "Diarrhea is among the most common RWIs, but they can also cause other gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic, and wound infections."

Even with proper pool maintenance, some microscopic parasites like *Cryptosporidium* (also known as "Crypto"), are able to survive up to 10 days in treated water and can cause diarrhea for weeks after symptoms stop. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), swallowing as little as 10 Crypto germs can cause an infection.

Rather than avoiding the pool altogether, the IPC urges everyone to take the following precautions to keep themselves and their fellow swimmers healthy:

- Avoid swimming if you have diarrhea;
- Shower with soap before swimming to help remove germs that could contaminate the water;
- Do not swallow water;
- Do not sit on water jets; and
- While at the pool, take children and infants on bathroom breaks and check for dirty diapers every hour.

Swimmers aren't the only ones who need to be conscious about safety this summer. Those who own or operate pools should be mindful of the chemicals in pool disinfectants, which can be dangerous when used improperly. If pool cleaner is ingested, touches the skin or is inhaled, it can cause a range of medical problems such as organ failure, loss of vision, severe abdominal pain, low blood pressure, or throat swelling.

These dangers were highlighted recently by an incident at a Utah pool where nearly 50 people became ill after excessive chlorine was inadvertently pumped into the pool.

To avoid medical complications:

- Always use the correct amount of pool cleaner and other substances;
- Handle and store pool cleaners as indicated on their packaging; and
- Unless directed, never mix materials. They can create toxic substances like chlorine gas.

For more summer safety tips from the IPC, [click here](#).

IPC experts are available to provide information and treatment advice 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, including holidays. If you suspect that you or someone you know has been exposed to a potentially harmful substance, please call the IPC at 800-222-1222. The call is free and confidential. For more information, visit the IPC's website: <http://illinoispoisoncenter.org>.

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The Illinois Poison Center is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists.