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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

The iconic music from the 1975 film *Jaws* may strike fear into the hearts of swimmers everywhere, but giant sharks aren't the only things to worry about when swimming. Even in a neighborhood pool, smaller threats lurking in the water can be just as scary as anything broadcast next week during the Discovery Channel's Shark Week.

"If you swim in pools, hot tubs, water parks, or any other water contaminated with germs, you're 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 germs like *Cryptosporidium*, which can cause diarrhea, are able to survive for up to 10 days in treated water. [According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), 32 outbreaks caused by *Cryptosporidium* linked to U.S. swimming pools or water playgrounds were reported in 2016, double the number reported in 2014.

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 recently highlighted by incidents at a waterpark in Northwest Indiana. Nearly a dozen children reported suffering from chemical burns after swimming at the waterpark, purportedly due to too much chlorine in the water.

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, which 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.