Johnson County Government Press Release
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Media Contact:
Barbara Mitchell, Public Information Officer
Johnson County Department of Health and Environment
barbara.mitchell@jocogov.org

Jennifer Dunlay, Risk Communicator
Johnson County Department of Health and Environment
jennifer.dunlay@jocogov.org
Media Line (913) 477-8436

HOW SWIMMERS CONTAMINATE POOLS

(OLATHE, KS – MAY 23, 2013) Every year, thousands of Americans get sick with recreational water illnesses (RWIs), which are caused by germs found in places where people swim. The goal of Recreational Water Illness and Injury (RWII) Prevention Week (May 20-26) is to raise awareness about healthy and safe swimming.

Di- or tri-chloramines form when chlorine combines with what comes out of (e.g., pee) or washes off of (e.g., sweat and personal care products) swimmers’ bodies and are different from the mono-chloramine, which is sometimes used to treat drinking water. Di- and tri-chloramines irritate the eyes and respiratory tract and can even aggravate asthma. The mixing of chlorine with urine not only creates chloramines—it also uses up the chlorine in the pool, which would otherwise kill germs. These germs get into the water when they wash off of swimmers’ bodies or when infected swimmers have diarrhea in the water. Chlorine and other pool water treatments don’t kill germs instantly. Just one diarrheal incident can release enough germs into the water that swallowing a mouthful can cause diarrhea lasting up to 2–3 weeks.

To help protect yourself and other swimmers from germs, here are a few simple and effective steps all swimmers can take each time they swim:

Keep the poop and pee out of the water.
- Don’t swim when you have diarrhea. Wait two weeks after diarrhea symptoms stop before going back in the pool.
- Shower with soap before you start swimming.

Take a rinse shower before you get back into the water.
- Take bathroom breaks every 60 minutes.
- Wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.

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Check the chlorine and pH levels before getting into the water.
- Proper chlorine (1–3 mg/L or parts per million [ppm]) and pH (7.2–7.8) levels maximize germ-killing power.
- Most superstores, hardware stores, and pool-supply stores sell pool test strips.

Don’t swallow the water you swim in.

Parents of young children should take a few extra steps:

Take children on bathroom breaks every 60 minutes or check diapers every 30–60 minutes.
- Change diapers in the bathroom or diaper-changing area and not at poolside where germs can rinse into the water.

For more information about healthy swimming, visit www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/.

The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment inspects pools in several Johnson County cities. Pool inspection staff is available for interviews on this topic by calling 913-477-8436.

About Johnson County
Located in the southwestern quadrant of the Kansas City Metropolitan Region, Johnson County, Kansas is a community of choice with a current population of more than 544,000, making it the most populated of the 105 counties in Kansas, but traditionally having the lowest mill levy in the state. Johnson County offers a vibrant quality of life including nationally recognized schools, libraries and parks where businesses and families choose to locate and call their home. For more information visit the county’s website at www.jocogov.org.