

Healthy Swimming

Fecal Incident Response Recommendations for Pool Staff*

What do you do when you
find poop in the pool?



*Check for existing guidelines from your local or state regulatory agency before use. CDC recommendations do not replace existing state or local regulations or guidelines.

- These recommendations are for responding to fecal incidents in chlorinated recreational water venues.
- Improper handling of chlorine-based disinfectants can cause injury. Follow proper occupational safety and health requirements when following these recommendations.
- **Pool Closures:** Fecal incidents are a concern and an inconvenience to both pool operators and patrons. Pool operators should carefully explain to patrons why the pool needs to be closed in response to a fecal incident. Understanding that pool closure is necessary for proper disinfection and protection of the health and safety of swimmers is likely to promote support rather than frustration. Pool closures allow chlorine to do its job — to kill germs and help prevent recreational water illnesses (RWIs).

www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming

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<http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/pdf/swimming/pools/fecal-incident-response-recommendations.pdf>

Important background info...

WHAT ARE RECREATIONAL WATER ILLNESSES (RWIs)?

What is the first thing that pops into your head when you think about water safety? Drowning? Slipping? Lightning? All good answers, and all are very important. But, did you know that germs can contaminate swimming water? These germs cause RWIs that have made many people sick.

RWIs are caused by germs such as “Crypto” (KRIP-toe), short for *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia* (gee-ARE-dee-uh), *E. coli* 0157:H7, and *Shigella* (Shi-GEL-uh).

HOW ARE RWIs SPREAD?

RWIs are spread by swallowing pool water that has been contaminated with fecal matter. How? If someone has diarrhea, that person can easily contaminate the pool. Think about it. Pool water is shared by every swimmer. Really, it's communal bathing water. It's not sterile. It's not drinking water.

The good news is that germs causing RWIs are killed by chlorine. However, chlorine doesn't work right away. It takes time to kill germs and some germs like Crypto can live in pools for days. Even the best maintained pools can spread illness.

SHOULD ALL FECAL INCIDENTS BE TREATED THE SAME?

No. A diarrheal fecal incident is a higher-risk event than a formed-stool incident. With most diarrheal illnesses, the number of infectious germs found in each bowel movement decreases as the diarrhea stops and the person's bowel movements return to normal. Therefore, a formed stool is probably less of a risk than a diarrheal incident that you may not see.

A formed stool may contain no germs, a few, or many that can cause illness. You won't know. The germs that may be present are less likely to be released into the pool because they are mostly contained within the stool. However, formed stool also protects germs inside from being exposed to the chlorine in the pool, so prompt removal is necessary.

Germ Inactivation Time for Chlorinated Water*

| Germ | Time |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>E. coli</i> O157:H7 Bacterium | Less than 1 minute |
| Hepatitis A Virus | About 16 minutes |
| <i>Giardia</i> Parasite | About 45 minutes |
| Crypto Parasite | About 15,300 minutes or 10.6 days [†] |

SHOULD YOU TREAT A FORMED FECAL INCIDENT AS IF IT CONTAINS CRYPTO?

No. In 1999, pool staff volunteers from across the country collected almost 300 samples from fecal incidents that occurred at water parks and pools.^{††} CDC then tested these samples for Crypto and *Giardia*. None of the sampled feces tested positive for Crypto, but *Giardia* was found in 4.4% of the samples collected. These results suggest that formed fecal incidents pose only a very small Crypto threat but should be treated as a risk for spreading other germs (such as *Giardia*). Remember a diarrheal fecal incident is considered to be a higher-risk event than a formed-stool fecal incident.

* 1 parts per million (ppm) or mg/L free chlorine at pH 7.5 or less and a temperature of 77°F (25°C) or higher.

[†] Shields JM, Hill VR, Arrowood MJ, Beach MJ. Inactivation of *Cryptosporidium parvum* under chlorinated recreational water conditions. J Water Health 2008;6(3):513–20.

^{††} CDC. Prevalence of Parasites in Fecal Material from Chlorinated Swimming Pools — United States, 1999. MMWR 2001;50(20):410–2.