



Department of Health

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Stay Cool and Swim Safely Advise County Officials

Brewster, NY—Swimming and other water sports are a great way to cool off in the hot, humid days of summer. These activities also provide exercise, and thousands of Putnam County families and visitors swim safely every year. At the same time, problems can arise if a person is not careful. Drowning is a risk even for good swimmers in some situations and water can carry germs that make a person sick.

“Putnam County offers residents and visitors wonderful places to swim and hike,” says County Executive MaryEllen Odell. “But when swimming in natural water, everyone must be careful, especially if you are not familiar with the water. We have lifeguards at our public beaches to protect everyone’s safety. No one should swim alone or without proper supervision.” Lakes, rivers, oceans, and even man-made structures such as a canal can be dangerous because of under-water rocks, hidden reeds or other vegetation or fast moving water.

“Drowning happens quickly,” says interim Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD. “A child should never be left alone even for a moment near any water. Swimming pools are a big concern for young children who cannot swim, or swim poorly. Adults watching children should not be reading or talking on the phone.” Broken or faulty fencing and open gates, as well as missing drain covers, all increase the chance of a tragedy.

For backyard pools, fencing must be installed on all sides with self-closing, self-locking gates that open outward. The fence should be at least 4 feet tall and ladders should be removed after using an above ground pool. If your fence attaches to your house, an alarm system must be installed. The complete NYS Building Code requirements are available online at <http://www.dos.ny.gov/DCEA/currpoolreq.htm>

Water illnesses are also a problem. Germs can be swallowed or inhaled through splashed water or mist. People can get these illnesses after swimming in any water—pools, water parks and sprays, lakes, rivers and even oceans. Swimmers share the water—and the germs in it. This can result in a variety of stomach, skin, ear, lung, eye and wound infections. The most common are illnesses that cause diarrhea and chlorine does not kill all these germs. For example Crypto, short for *Cryptosporidium*, can live in chlorine for an extended period of time. The best prevention is good hygiene. All swimmers should stay out of the water when they are ill with diarrhea, even if they are wearing swim diapers or swim pants. People with a diarrhea-related illness should not return to swimming for two weeks afterwards. Children should take bathroom breaks every 60 minutes, and hands should always be washed after changing diapers. Take a shower with soap before swimming, and pay special care not to swallow the water you swim in. Parents of young children should check all diapers often and change them in the restroom facilities—not poolside, where germs can wind up in the water. Swim diapers and swim pants often give users, parents and pool staff a false sense of security and are not a substitute for frequent diaper changing and bathroom breaks.

Blue-green algae that have bloomed in Putnam’s lakes in previous summers can make humans and animals sick as well. They usually do not arrive until later in the season, but can occur at any time. The Putnam County Department of Health monitors the public beaches and they are closed if necessary.

The Department of Health’s mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit the PCDOH website at www.putnamcountyny.com/health or visit the social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth, and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

More information: Healthy swimming: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/>

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