



Go Jump in a Lake (a healthy one)!

Dreaming of a vacation by the lake? Fishing, tubing, and refreshing swims are many executive's idea of a great way to spend time off with family and friends. Unfortunately, water contamination isn't limited to oil spills. While generally rare, it's important to be aware that many of the major disease outbreaks have been transmitted by water-borne bacterium.

We don't know how many naturally occurring species of bacteria are present in soil and water in the environment, but it's estimated there are between 10 million to one billion species in the wild. We do know that healthy bacteria keeps nature in balance by causing material to decay as well as to help the digestive systems of many living organisms, including humans. Just consider the latest trend to add bacteria to our diets via yogurts and other foods. While most bacteria are beneficial - and untreated water contains millions of bacteria - certain types can cause serious or even potentially fatal hazards.

The most common harmful bacteria found in lakes and ponds are fecal coliform. This bacterium is found in the digestive tract of warm-blooded animals including humans, horses, cows, chickens, cats, dogs, and waterfowl. For most lakes, geese, gulls, and ducks are considered to be the major source of bacteria, especially where large bird populations reside. Lakes and ponds can also be contaminated by sewer overflows, poor treatment of municipal waste, or even improper human waste disposal from camp sites. Other contamination can be caused by heavy rainfall washing bacteria from feces into the surrounding soil and further into ponds, streams or lakes. Simply put, it only takes a small amount of feces to quickly contaminate a recreational body of water.

And it only takes a small amount of this contaminated water to cause a major illness. Accidentally swallowing bacteria laden water, wading through lake mud with an open cut, or even inhaling a droplet can bring you into contact with some of these microorganisms which can cause skin, ear and eye infections, diarrhea, and even respiratory problems.

While the CDC reports that bacteria are common and sickness caused by it is generally rare, officials caution swimmers not to drink lake water or dig in the mud around lakes. You and your family should also avoid a swim after heavy rain as large amounts of contaminants are flushed into nearby lakes, streams and ponds. It's also best to swim in well-maintained private or municipal pools - never in cattle ponds or water troughs. Officials also



caution swimmers to avoid water with a surface scum or blue-green flecks and to keep pets away, too.

Before heading out for a quick dip, check with the local Health Department for any closures, warnings, or reports. If someone in your party is ill with diarrhea, ask them to avoid swimming until they are healthy.

If you believe you or a member of your family have been exposed to water borne bacteria, see your doctor at Executive MD for a full diagnosis.

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