

DANGEROUS PARASITE IN LAKE AND POND WATER

HEALTH ALERT

Naegleria

Naegleria is a big name for a very tiny parasite (ameba) that is usually found in fresh water bodies such as lakes and ponds.

NAEGLERIA FOWLERI

Naegleria fowleri causes an infection that develops when these parasites enter the human body through the nose, making their way to the brain.

PAM

This infection causes a rare, but life threatening disease called primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM).

Symptoms of PAM can start as quickly as 1 to 14 days after infection. Symptoms include headache, fever, nausea, vomiting and stiff neck.

THE DISEASE MOVES VERY QUICKLY

As the disease moves into the brain, it causes swelling which leads to confusion, lack of attention, loss of balance, seizure and hallucinations. This disease usually results in death within 3 to 7 days.

SAFEST WAY TO PREVENT INFECTION

Do not swim in warm, standing water, such as lakes, ponds, poorly maintained swimming pools, storm water holding areas or in places that are posted "No Swimming." Bacteria and other harmful organisms thrive in warm, standing water.

CLOSING YOUR NOSTRILS

Wear nose clips, hold your nose shut or keep your head out of the water when swimming, jumping or diving in any freshwater. Closing your nostrils may reduce your chance of becoming infected.

RISK INCREASES DURING HOT SUMMER MONTHS

Avoid swimming or jumping into these bodies of fresh water during the hot summer months when the water is warm and the water levels are low. As temperatures rise so does your chance of becoming infected.

PARASITE LIVES IN SAND AND SILT

Do not dig or stir up the sand and silt while swimming in shallow water.

SAFER SWIMMING

This infection cannot be spread from person to person or contracted from a properly maintained swimming pool.

GET MORE FACTS

Visit: www.myfloridaEH.com or search for keywords *Naegleria fowleri* at: www.cdc.gov. You can also find out more by calling your local county health department.



Seek immediate medical attention if you have any of these symptoms after swimming in freshwater:

HEADACHE

FEVER

NAUSEA

VOMITING

STIFF NECK



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH

DIVISION OF
Environmental Health



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HEALTH WARNING FOR SWIMMING IN FRESHWATER LAKES AND PONDS

ORLANDO – The Orange County Health Department is warning people to take precautions while swimming in freshwater lakes and ponds due to the threat posed by the amoeba *Naegleria fowleri*. There is an increased risk of infection by this organism in all freshwater areas in Florida, especially during summer months when the water temperature exceeds 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

Infection with the amoeba *Naegleria fowleri* is very rare. Amoebas are commonly found in the environment, in water and soil. It is important to take precautions while swimming in freshwater lakes and ponds. Properly cleaned, maintained and chlorinated pools do not pose a risk for this infection.

The following precautions are advised to decrease the possibility of infection:

- 1) Wear nose clips or hold your nose shut when swimming, jumping or diving in any fresh water.
- 2) Do not swim, jump or dive in warm, stagnant, fresh water, such as ponds, storm water and retention areas.
- 3) Seek medical treatment if symptoms develop or infection is suspected.

Naegleria fowleri is a microscopic amoeba most commonly found in the upper layer of sediment in the bottom of lakes and ponds with mud floors. The infection occurs when the amoeba enters the body through the nose and travels to the brain and spinal cord while the person is swimming underwater or diving.

The disease progresses rapidly, usually resulting in death within 3 to 7 days. Symptoms include headache, fever, nausea and vomiting, stiff neck, confusion, lack of attention to people and surroundings, loss of balance and bodily control, seizures and hallucinations. This infection cannot be spread from person to person.

For more information, contact the Orange County Health Department Epidemiology Program at (407) 858-1420.

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"To Promote and Protect the Health and Safety of Orange County Residents and Visitors by Providing Quality Public Health Services"



***Naegleria* Infection** (nuh-GLEER-e-uh)

What is *Naegleria*?

Naegleria is an amoeba commonly found in the environment, in water and soil. Only one species of *Naegleria* has been found to infect humans, *Naegleria fowleri*.

Where is *Naegleria* found?

Naegleria fowleri is found worldwide. Most commonly, the amoeba is found in

- Warm bodies of fresh water, such as lakes, rivers, and hot springs
- Warm water discharge from industrial plants
- Under-chlorinated swimming pools
- Soil

How common is *Naegleria* infection?

Although *Naegleria* is commonly found in the environment, infection occurs rarely. Only 24 infections were documented in the U.S. between 1989 and 2000.

When is *Naegleria* most common?

Infection with *Naegleria* is most common during the dry, summer months, when the temperature is above 80° F and the water is warm and water levels are low.

How does infection with *Naegleria* occur?

Infection with *Naegleria* occurs when the amoeba enters the body through the nose while the person is swimming underwater or diving. The amoeba then travels to the brain and spinal cord.

What are the signs and symptoms of *Naegleria* infection?

Infection with *Naegleria* causes the disease primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM), a brain inflammation, which leads to the destruction of brain tissue. Initial signs and symptoms of PAM include headache, fever, nausea, vomiting, and stiff neck. As the amoeba causes more extensive destruction of brain tissue this leads to confusion, lack of attention to people and surroundings, loss of balance and bodily control, seizures, hallucinations. The disease progresses rapidly and infection usually results in death within 3 to 7 days.

Is there treatment for infection with *Naegleria*?

Several drugs are effective against *Naegleria* in the laboratory. However, although a variety of treatments have been used to treat infected persons, their effectiveness is unclear since most infections have still been fatal. Prompt diagnosis and treatment may help.

Can infection be spread from person to person?

No. *Naegleria* infection cannot be spread from person to person contact.

How can I prevent an infection with *Naegleria*?

- Avoid swimming or jumping into bodies of warm fresh water
- Avoid swimming in thermally polluted water (water around power plants)
- Do not swim in areas posted as “no swimming.”
- Hold the nose shut or use nose clips when jumping or diving into bodies of fresh water.
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For further information on protecting yourself from recreational water illnesses, go to www.healthyswimming.org.

Can I get *Naegleria* infection from a swimming pool?

No. You cannot get *Naegleria* infection from a swimming pool as long as the pool is properly cleaned, maintained, and chlorinated.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have a parasitic infection, consult a health care provider.

