



STATE OF MARYLAND

# DHMH PRESS RELEASE

**Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**

201 W. Preston Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – John M. Colmers, Secretary

*Office of Communications*

*David Paulson*

*Karen Black*

*410-767-6490*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **National Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week** *Safe Behaviors for Healthy Swimming*

BALTIMORE, MD (May 18, 2009) – In an effort to call attention to the importance of careful pool maintenance and swimming behaviors, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) is recognizing the week of May 18 – 24 as National Recreational Water Illness (RWI) Prevention Week.

“With about a week to go before Memorial Day and the traditional start of summer activities, now is the perfect time to call attention to steps you can take to stay healthy while enjoying water-related activities,” said DHMH Secretary John M. Colmers. “These are especially important to help protect the young, elderly, pregnant women and those with immune-suppressed conditions.”

The theme for this year’s RWI Prevention Week focuses on preventing injuries associated with pool chemicals. Pool chemicals make the water safer by reducing germs; however, these same chemicals can also cause injuries if they are not properly handled. This type of preventable injury leads to thousands of emergency room visits each year. Public pool operators and residential pool owners can protect themselves and swimmers by taking these key steps:

- ALWAYS secure pool chemicals: Keep children and animals away.
- ALWAYS read product name and manufacturer’s directions before each use.
- ALWAYS use appropriate protective gear, such as safety glasses and gloves, when handling pool chemicals.
- NEVER mix chlorine products with each other, acid, or other substances.

In addition, a federal law that took effect last December requires public pool and spa owners to implement a safety measure that will reduce accidental suction entrapment incidents. The law, the Virginia Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act, requires anti-entrapment systems installed at all public pools and spas.

Maryland State public pool and spa regulations addressed this issue in 2002 requiring all public pool/spa owners to install dual drains or suction vacuum release systems. However, the new federal law requires public pool/spa owners to go a step further and install drain covers that not only protect against body entrapment and evisceration, but also against hair entanglement, limb entrapment, and mechanical entrapment.

Everyone can play a part to ensure a safe and healthy swimming environment. In addition to equipment and chemical standards, awareness of recreational water illnesses and proper swimming behaviors are important for a healthy swimming experience. Even well maintained pools can transmit germs that cause RWIs, so it is important to remember the following actions you can take to promote healthy swimming:

- ! Do not swim when you have diarrhea;
- ! Do not swallow pool water or get pool water in your mouth;
- ! Shower before swimming (children too!);
- ! Wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers;
- ! Take children on bathroom breaks or change diapers often; and
- ! Change children's diapers in a bathroom, not at poolside.

For more information about Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week and Healthy Swimming, visit [www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming).