

Infectious Disease Education

5 Common Waterborne Illnesses

During the warm summer months, many of us enjoy spending time in and around water. Bodies of water, such as pools, rivers, and lakes, could harbor germs responsible for waterborne illness. In addition, unclean drinking water can be a source of contamination. Review the below information on five of the most common waterborne illnesses to increase your awareness of prevention strategies and symptoms. As always, if you experience any unusual health symptoms, contact your medical provider for evaluation and guidance.

1

Swimmer's Ear (also known as otitis externa)

Overview: A bacterial infection typically caused by water that stayed in the outer ear canal for a long period of time.

Symptoms: Ear pain, temporary hearing loss, itchiness and swelling of ear, and discharge from ear.

Prevention: Dry your ears thoroughly after swimming or showering.

Treatment: Antibiotic ear drops are usually prescribed.



2

Norovirus

Overview: A very contagious virus that causes vomiting and diarrhea.

Symptoms: Diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, nausea, fever, and headache.

Prevention: Avoid having direct contact with an infected person, consuming contaminated food or water, touching contaminated surfaces, and hand washing.

Treatment: Dehydration prevention with fluids and electrolytes is the normal course of treatment.

3

Giardiasis

Overview: A diarrheal disease caused by the parasite *Giardia duodenalis*.

Symptoms: Diarrhea, gas, stomach cramps or pain, upset stomach or nausea.

Prevention: Practice good hygiene, and only drink water from clean, safe sources. You should also peel or wash fresh fruit and vegetables before eating.

Treatment: It can resolve on its own, but most cases require antibiotics.

4

Cryptosporidiosis

Overview: A disease that causes watery diarrhea. It is caused by parasites called *Cryptosporidium*.

Symptoms: Diarrhea, stomach cramps or pain, dehydration, nausea, vomiting, fever, and weight loss.

Prevention: Avoid water, food, soil, or surfaces contaminated with feces of humans or animals infected.

Treatment: Anti-parasitic medications, antidiarrheal medications, and fluid replacement are used.

5

Legionnaires' disease

Overview: A type of severe pneumonia that is caused by breathing in small droplets of water that contain *Legionella* bacteria. Commonly found in hot tubs, decorative fountains, and lakes.

Symptoms: Cough, shortness of breath, headache, muscle aches, and fever.

Prevention: Make sure disinfectants in hot tubs/spas are kept at the level and pH needed to reduce the risk of spreading germs like *Legionella*.

Treatment: Antibiotics are usually prescribed. This disease can be fatal if not treated.