

Is It Safe to Swim in a Pool during the Summer of Coronavirus?

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In a nutshell...

This article discusses two important issues of pool safety in the summer of COVID-19, pool water quality and navigating crowds. These factors are examined in the contexts of both public and backyard pool venues.

Are you planning to swim in a backyard or public pool this summer? Many public pools will not open this year, but those that do will likely require social distancing and other measures [proposed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus at aquatic facilities. Being at a public pool this summer could be a less-than-carefree experience as you abide by these measures, including continually readjusting your position to stay at least 6 feet away from everyone else, in or out of the water.

On the other hand, you may be lucky enough to have a backyard pool that you can enjoy with your family. Or maybe you are acquiring one. A recent article¹ in *Aqua* magazine reports skyrocketing sales by pool and spa companies this spring.

Regardless of the type of pool you are contemplating immersing yourself in when the temperatures soar, a basic question is whether pool swimming will be safe in the summer of COVID-19. We think it comes down to two issues, pool water quality and navigating crowds.

Issue #1: Swimming Pool Water Quality

We have it on good authority, namely the [CDC](#), that “There is no evidence that COVID-19 can spread to people through the water in pools, hot tubs, spas, or water areas. Proper operation and disinfection (including disinfection with chlorine and bromine²) of these facilities should inactivate the virus in water.” This is great news with only one caveat, and that is *proper pool operation and disinfection*. For example, as long as pool water is maintained at between 1 and 4 parts per million free chlorine and the pH between 7.2 and 7.8, the virus will not survive in water. Keeping those values well within those acceptable ranges is the challenge for pool operators and backyard pool owners alike.



¹ “Pool and Spa Sales Booming as Shutdown Ends,” by Alex Paniagua, *Aqua* magazine, May 2020. On line. Available: <https://aquamagazine.com/news/pool-and-spa-sales-booming-as-shutdown-ends.html>, accessed 5-22-20.

² Chlorine is a common swimming pool water disinfectant, whereas bromine is commonly used to disinfect the water in spas and hot tubs.

[CDC guidelines](#) recommend testing the chlorine level and pH of pool water at least twice per day, and more often during heavy use. But a recent Water Quality & Health Council survey of over 2,100 American adults found that 23% of pool owners do not test chlorine and pH more often than *once every two weeks*. Bottom line: if you want to ensure COVID-19 and other waterborne pathogens cannot be transmitted in pool water, make sure someone is testing that water frequently!

Issue #2: Navigating Crowds at Swimming Pools

Your proximity to other people is another important issue in avoiding COVID-19. The disease is chiefly spread through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, [according to CDC](#). Maintaining at least six feet of distance from others both in and out of the pool helps avoid these droplets from others, but it's a chore that requires constant vigilance.

Of course social distancing should not be necessary if you are using your backyard pool with the family members with whom you live. At a public pool, however, CDC goes so far as to suggest pool patrons and staff don face masks when not in the water; clean and then disinfect frequently touched surfaces (e.g., handrails, slides, and climbing/playing structures) daily, and shared objects (e.g., lounge chairs, table tops, pool noodles, kickboards) each time they are used. Equipment that is meant to come in contact with the face (e.g., goggles, nose clips, and snorkels) should not be shared. Remember that you should only ease restrictions at your backyard pool if you are swimming with your household family members. Inviting others to your backyard pool means distancing, face masks, and surface disinfection measures are warranted.

Not a Normal Swimming Pool Season

This will be a summer of cancelled swim and dive team meets. Friendly gatherings at community pools will likely be replaced by neighbors' efforts to keep a safe distance from one another. Fortunately, keeping a safe physical distance doesn't mean we can't stay in touch with family and friends.

Be safe in and around the swimming pool!

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