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Waging war on water dangers

By Mollie Miller
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The cool, blue water of oceans, pools, lakes and rivers, so inviting on a hot summer day, often harbors more than a simple respite from the heat.

The dangers lurking in the deep blue depths are many but every one of the risks can be mitigated with the right planning and preparation, according to U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center Safety Specialist Richard Scott.

“Water safety is about using common sense,” Scott said recently. “Understanding the risks associated with pools, oceans, lakes and rivers can help you avoid many of the situations that put our Soldiers and their Family members in danger every year.”

Last summer, the Army lost three Soldiers to water-related accidents. This year, officials are urging all Soldiers, civilians and their Family members to do their research so they can stay water safe.

“We have recorded deaths and injuries that have occurred in pools, lakes, oceans and rivers,” Scott said. “To be safe, you have to know the threats, know your limitations and know how to keep yourself and your friends and family out of harm’s way at all times when you are around water.”

The American Red Crosses’ “Too List” is a good place for people to start when educating themselves about things they can do to mitigate risks associated with water fun.

“The list reminds people to never get ‘too tired, too cold, too far away from safety, too much sun or too much strenuous activity,’” Scott said.

Two activities associated with summer water fun are swimming and diving. Swimming and diving both offer opportunities to cool off in a fun, safe way on hot summer days as long as some simple safety procedures are followed first.

When swimming, it is important to always swim with a buddy and never try to swim farther than your ability or fitness level can take you.

“Remember, even good swimmers get tired,” Scott said.



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Jody Valdes, head life guard at the Andrews Avenue Physical Fitness Center at Fort Rucker, Ala., said she has seen many children, and even a few adults, who have over estimated their swimming abilities, grown too tired and have to be rescued.

“It’s important to know your limitations,” she said. “Just stay in the shallow end and work on your skills until you are ready for a longer swim.”

When children are involved in a swimming activity, Valdes said constant supervision is a must.

“Never, never let children swim without close supervision,” she said. “A life jacket is not a good substitute for keen and observant adult eyes.”

Like swimming, diving is a water activity that has been known to cause serious injuries and even death when divers fail to take proper safety precautions.

Scott said already this year, one Soldier has been permanently disabled because of a shallow water diving accident.

“Do not to dive anywhere that you don’t know how deep the water is or what hazards might be hiding just below the surface,” he said. “It might look fun on the surface but that fun will be very short-lived if someone gets hurt or killed.”

Before taking a big leap, Scott recommends checking the water depth and jumping feet first to avoid hitting your head on a shallow bottom. Never dive on top of someone else.

Valdez reminds those visiting pools this summer to only dive in approved areas that are deep enough for diving.

“Look for the signs,” she said.

Whether swimming or diving this summer, Scott reminds all water lovers that alcohol never mixes well with any swimming or diving activity.

“The dangers are always there,” he said. “Never underestimate the power of water.”

For more information about water safety, visit the American Red Cross Web site at <https://www.prepare.org>. For more information about the Army’s Safe Summer Campaign, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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Water-related injury prevention tips

- Designate a responsible adult to watch young children while around water. Adults should not be involved in any other distracting activity (such as reading or talking on the phone) while supervising children.
- Always swim with a buddy. Select swimming sites that have lifeguards whenever possible.
- Avoid drinking alcohol before or during any water activity.
- Learn to swim.
- Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
- Never use air-filled or foam toys like “water wings,” “noodles” or inner-tubes in place of personal flotation devices. These toys are not designed to keep swimmers safe.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Low chlorine levels can lead to recreational water illnesses

By Mollie Miller

U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center

When traveling this summer and a dip in a hotel, community or water park pool sounds like the perfect way to beat the heat, remember that not all pools are as clean as they might appear.

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a position paper discussing the threat of Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs).

RWIs are caused by germs like cryptosporidium, giardia, E. Coli and Shigella and are spread by accidentally swallowing water that has been contaminated with fecal matter. Although chlorine does kill all these germs, it takes awhile to completely clean the water so if someone swallows the water while the germs are still active, they could get sick.

Jon Cole, aquatics manager at Fort Rucker, Ala., said while RWIs have been around for a long time, medical professionals have only recently realized the vastness of the problem as more and more water theme parks and spray parks open around the country.

“Ten or 15 years ago, when people got sick, especially with bad diarrhea, the illness was naturally attributed to where or what people ate,” Cole said. “Now, if they have been swimming, an RWI is a feasible diagnosis for their illness.”

Officials at the CDC offer a list of six healthy swimming habits that can help keep all swimmers free from illness this summer.

First, don't swim when you have diarrhea, especially children. Don't swallow pool water or even get any in your mouth. Practice good hygiene, take a shower before swimming and wash your hands after using the bathroom or changing diapers. Take kids on bathroom breaks frequently. Change diapers in the bathroom, not poolside. Finally, wash children thoroughly with soap and water before swimming.

In addition to these healthy swimming habits, Cole also suggests purchasing a few chlorine test strips at a local pool supply store. These strips can be used to test the chlorine levels at local pools, water parks and hotels.

“It just takes one fecal accident by a small child and a very slight mechanical malfunction in the pump room to create a potential RWI outbreak,” Cole said. “Be careful out there.”