

NAEGLERIA FOWLERI
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One of my families favorite summer past times is boating. After hearing about naegleria fowleri I became concerned about the safety of swimming in our local lakes, and decided to investigate. According to the AP in 2007, 6 persons died in 2007 from the amoeba naegleria fowleri, 3 persons in Florida, 2 in Texas and 1 in Lake Havasu Arizona. From 1995 – 2004 23 persons died in the U.S. as a result of naegleria fowleri. As you can see the amoeba is primarily found in southern tier states. According to a recent quote by Dr. Rebecca Suneshine, deputy state epidemiologist of the Arizona Department of Health *"I would swim in Lake Havasu...and I would let my children swim there."* She went on to say the infection was, "incredibly rare."

How does naegleria fowleri infection occur?

When the amoeba enters the body through the nose. This usually occurs when people are participating in water-related activities such as summing underwater, diving or other water sports where water goes up the nose. The amoeba then travels to the brain and spinal cord where it destroys brain tissue. All 6 persons who died last year were boys, or young men. It is felt that the reasons boys are more likely to be a victim is they tend to be more boisterous in the water.

What are the signs and symptoms of naegleria fowleri?

Symptoms begin 1 – 14 days after infection. Symptoms include headache, fever, nausea, vomiting and stiff neck. As the amoebae cause more extensive destruction of the brain tissue confusion, lack of attention to people and surroundings, loss of balance, seizures and hallucinations develop. After symptoms occur the disease progresses rapidly and death usually occurs in 3 – 7 days.

How can you decrease the risk of infection from naegleria fowleri?

Avoid swimming or jumping into bodies of warm freshwater, hot springs and thermally-polluted water such as water around power plants.

Avoid swimming or jumping into freshwater, such as lakes and rivers, during periods of high temperature and low water volume.

Hold your nose shut or use nose clips when jumping or diving into bodies of warm freshwater such as lakes, rivers or hot springs.

Avoid digging in or stirring up the sediment while swimming in shallow, warm freshwater areas.

Do not swim in areas posted as no swimming or in areas warning about an increased risk of naegleria infection.

Do not swim in pools that are poorly maintained and minimally chlorinated.

Information for this article was obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.