For IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week
May 21st-28th

BARTOW — The Polk County Health Department would like to make families aware of simple steps they can take to prevent recreational water illnesses and ensure a healthy and safe swimming season for everyone.

Knowing the basic facts about recreational water illnesses can make the difference between an enjoyable time at the pool, beach, or water park, and getting a rash, having diarrhea, or developing other potentially serious illnesses.

Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs) are spread by swallowing, breathing, or having contact with contaminated water from swimming pools, spas, hot tubs, water activity parks, lakes, rivers, or oceans. RWIs can cause a wide variety of conditions, including gastrointestinal, skin, ear, eye, respiratory, neurological, and wound infections. The most frequently reported RWI is diarrhea, although Swimmer’s Ear is also common, and can cause severe pain and discomfort, particularly in children.

Awareness of RWIs and healthy swimming practices plays an important role in stopping the spread of disease. Children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with compromised immune systems can suffer from more severe illnesses if they become infected. People with weakened immune systems should consult their healthcare provider before participating in activities that place them at risk for illness.

Following these healthy swimming steps will help protect you, your family, and other swimmers from RWIs:

- Do not swim when you have diarrhea.
- Do not swallow pool water. In fact, avoid getting water in your mouth.
- Shower before swimming.
- Take children on bathroom breaks or change diapers often.
- Change diapers in a bathroom, not at poolside, and dispose of properly.
- Wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.

Swimmers should also be aware of the dangers of the amoeba, Naegleria, a naturally occurring, microscopic organism commonly found in warm freshwater and soil. Naegleria infects people by entering the body through the nose, and can result in a very rare but severe brain inflammation called Primary Amoebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM). This typically occurs when people swim or dive in warm freshwater places. People should avoid freshwater recreational activities when water temperature is high and water volume is low. They should also avoid digging in or stirring up the sediment in shallow, warm freshwater areas.

For more information regarding Recreational Water Illness Prevention Week and Healthy Swimming, contact the Polk County Health Department at (863) 519-8330 or visit http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming.

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