

8-1-2011

## A Snapshot of Swimmer Hygiene Behavior

Chris Wiant

*Water Quality & Health Council*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ijare>

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wiant, Chris (2011) "A Snapshot of Swimmer Hygiene Behavior," *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*: Vol. 5: No. 3, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25035/ijare.05.03.03>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ijare/vol5/iss3/3>

This Letter to the Editors is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

---

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

---

*International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 2011, 5, 244-245  
© 2011 Human Kinetics, Inc.

# A Snapshot of Swimmer Hygiene Behavior

Chris Wiant



WATER QUALITY &  
HEALTH COUNCIL™

A 2009 public survey found a large percentage of Americans (47%) admit to unhygienic behaviors in public pools, including “peeing” in the pool (17%) and foregoing showering before swimming (35%). The survey also found that the majority of Americans (84%) believe their fellow swimmers engage in unhygienic behaviors at public swimming pools.

These survey data are relevant as researchers work to understand the complex chemistry of swimming pools, including chemical interactions between swimming pool disinfectants and organic compounds introduced into pool water by swimmers. Substances in urine and perspiration, for example, are known to react with chemical disinfectants to form disinfection byproducts, which have been variously associated with potential health effects.

LaKind, Richardson, and Blout (2010) discuss the need to protect swimmers from pathogens in pool water while minimizing their exposure to disinfection byproducts. They postulate that a greater public awareness of the health risks associated with unhygienic swimmer practices may help modify these behaviors. The survey data summarized below (Table 1) do not enable a quantitative assessment of the impact of such behaviors on the water quality of a specific pool. The data that are offered here do provide one measure of the extent of these unhygienic practices, which may be instructive as pool operators consider how to protect the health of swimmers.

The survey was commissioned by the Water Quality & Health Council, an independent, multidisciplinary group of public health and consumer experts sponsored by the Chlorine Chemistry Division of the American Chemistry Council. The survey was conducted electronically between April 30 and May 3, 2009, using a sample of 1,000 U.S. adults and the field services of TNS Omnibus. Results were weighted to reflect the adult population based on U.S. Census figures, including age, gender, geographic region, household income, and household size. The margin of error for the study was  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points at 95% confidence.

---

Chris Wiant, MPH., PhD, is Chair of the Water Quality & Health Council, Denver, CO.

**Table 1 Percentage Responses to the Following Question: Which, if any, of the Following Do You Believe People Do in a Public Pool? Have You Ever Done any of the Following in a Public Pool?**

|   | Believe Other Swimmers Are Doing | Have Done |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Any of the following  | 84%                              | 47%       |
| Urinate/pee   | 78%                              | 17%       |
| Bring food into the pool  | 35%                              | 4%        |
| Bring drinks into the pool  | 40%                              | 12%       |
| Swim when ill with diarrhea   | 38%                              | 1%        |
| Swim with a runny nose  | 69%                              | 11%       |
| Swim with an exposed rash or cut  | 65%                              | 7%        |
| Skip the shower before swimming   | 73%                              | 35%       |
| Wear a dirty bathing suit   | 56%                              | 5%        |
| Fail to report that their infant or toddler has pooped in their diaper/bathing suit while in the pool | 62%                              | *         |
| None of these   | 2%                               | 48%       |
| Don't know  | 14%                              | 5%        |

*Note.* Multiple responses were allowed for both questions.

## Reference

- LaKind, J.S., Richardson, S.D., Blount, B.C. (2010). The good, the bad, and the volatile: Can we have both healthy pools and healthy people? *Environmental Science Technology*, 44 (9): 3205–3210.