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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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New Public Survey Reveals Swimmer Hygiene Attitudes and Practices

In April, 2012, public survey by the Water Quality & Health Council reveals the majority of Americans (68%) do not always shower before entering the swimming pool, and that a high percentage of them (44%) view a preswim shower as unnecessary. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Americans (95%) believe they can play an important, beneficial role in pool hygiene. Some say they would be more likely to shower under certain circumstances, including cleaner showers (38%), signs indicating showering is a pool rule (37%), increased privacy (35%), or accessibility (31%).

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages good swimmer hygiene through its "Triple As of Healthy Swimming," which include "Awareness, Action and Advocacy." In the category of Awareness, CDC advises, "Practice good hygiene. Shower with soap before swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Germs on your body end up in the water." CDC also warns swimmers never to swim when sick with diarrhea and to avoid getting pool water in the mouth. These measures are intended to prevent transmission of germs through the fecal-oral route.

In 2009, the Water Quality & Health Council reported on its first public survey of swimmer hygiene (see *A Snapshot of Swimmer Hygiene Behavior*). At that time, 17% of respondents admitted to "peeing in the pool," a result that garnered extensive public interest and media coverage. The current survey found no significant change in this practice after 3 years, within the stated margin of error. In contrast a significantly greater percentage of respondents admit to skipping the preswim shower (43%) in 2012 than in 2009 (35%). Very few respondents (approximately 1%) in either survey admit to swimming when ill with diarrhea.

Swimmer hygiene survey results from both 2009 and 2012 are summarized in Table 1. These data do not enable a quantitative assessment of swimmer hygiene on swimming pool water quality, but do provide information on swimmer hygiene attitudes and practices that could help inform education efforts.

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 4 and April 8, 2012, 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 ± 3.1 percentage points at 95% confidence.

Table 1 Public Survey on Swimmer Hygiene Attitudes and Practices

| Survey Year | Believe Other Swimmers | | | |
|--|------------------------|------|-----------|------|
| | Are Doing | | Have Done | |
| | 2009 | 2012 | 2009 | 2012 |
| Urinate/pee | 78% | 81% | 17% | 19% |
| Bring food into the pool | 35% | 35% | 4% | 4% |
| Bring drinks into the pool | 40% | 47% | 12% | 15% |
| Swim when ill with diarrhea | 38% | 34% | 1% | <1% |
| Swim with a runny nose | 69% | 68% | 11% | 11% |
| Swim with an exposed rash or cut | 65% | 66% | 7% | 8% |
| Skip the shower before swimming | 73% | 79% | 35% | 43% |
| Fail to report that their infant or toddler has pooped in their diaper/ bathing suit while in the pool | 62% | 62% | — | 1% |

Percentage responses to the questions (1) Which, if any, of the following do you believe people do in a public pool? and (2) Have you ever done any of the following in a public pool? (Multiple responses were allowed for both questions.)

References

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