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POOL OF KNOWLEDGE: WOA SHARES TIPS TO KEEP YOUNG SWIMMERS' EYES SAFE

Optometrists Warn Against Eye Infections Linked to Swimming

MADISON, Wis. – With swim season in full swing across Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is urging parents to take simple steps to protect their children's eyes while swimming..

"Public pools—even those with effective disinfection systems—can harbor bacteria and microorganisms that may irritate the eyes or, in rare cases, cause serious infections," said Dr. Rebecca Kabat, WOA President. "Every summer, we see an increase in red, irritated eyes due to pool chemicals, along with questions about swimming with contact lenses."

Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reinforce the ongoing risks of waterborne illness in treated recreational settings. From 2015 to 2019, the CDC documented 208 outbreaks linked to treated water—such as pools, hot tubs, and splash pads—resulting in hundreds of reported cases and numerous hospitalizations¹. In 2021 alone, 22 outbreaks tied to treated recreational water were reported across 20 states, leading to 219 cases, 37 hospitalizations, and one death². A separate CDC review found that splash pads alone accounted for 60 outbreaks between 1997 and 2021, resulting in over 10,000 cases, with most linked to the parasite *Cryptosporidium*³.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises against exposing contact lenses to any water source—including swimming pools, hot tubs, and showers—due to increased risk of infection. "One of the most serious infections, though rare, is *Acanthamoeba* keratitis, which can result in permanent vision loss or require a corneal transplant," said Dr. Edward Bennett, past chair of the American Optometric Association's Contact Lens and Cornea Section.

WOA recommends the following precautions for contact lens wearers during swimming or other water activities:

- Remove contact lenses before swimming, showering, or using a hot tub.
- If contacts must be worn in water, wear watertight swim goggles.
- Dispose of contact lenses immediately if they come into contact with water.

To find an optometrist near you or learn more about eye safety, visit www.woa-eyes.org/members.

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About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 Doctors of Optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit the WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.

Footnotes

1. CDC. (2021). *Outbreaks Associated with Treated Recreational Water – United States, 2015–2019*. MMWR, 70(20), 713–717. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7020a2.htm>
2. CDC. (2023). *National Outbreak Reporting System (NORS) Dashboard Summary – 2021*. <https://www.cdc.gov/nors/index.html>
3. CDC. (2024). *Outbreaks Associated with Splash Pads – United States, 1997–2021*. MMWR Summary. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7310a2.htm>