



Sweet Evidence for an Unsavory Practice: Peeing in the Pool

By Chris Wiant, M.P.H., Ph.D.

People urinate in swimming pools. It's been a widely discussed topic since we published the results of our [2009 survey](#) concluding that one in five American adults admit to having "peed in the pool." Now there is physical evidence for this unsavory act, and it appears in the form of an artificial sweetener, of all things. A Canadian [research team has identified a chemical compound](#) in pool water that indicates the presence of urine. The "chemical marker" is *acesulfame-K*, or "ACE," a synthetic sweetener found in prepackaged foods. ACE passes through the body essentially unaltered, and is excreted exclusively in the urine. The researchers posit that ACE could be a useful indicator of pool water quality.



The Problem with Peeing in the Pool

Besides being a rather discourteous thing to do, peeing in the pool contributes to poor pool water quality. Urine contains nitrogen-containing compounds that combine chemically with chlorine disinfectant to produce eye, skin and respiratory irritants. That strong chemical smell around some pools is not "the smell of chlorine," but chemical products of chlorine's reaction with urine, perspiration, cosmetics and body oils from swimmers. Chlorine, added to destroy waterborne pathogens that could make swimmers sick, is depleted by its reaction with these impurities. That's why the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) encourages swimmers to shower before swimming and refrain from sneakily relieving themselves underwater.

Strategies to Avoid Using the Pool as a Toilet

We believe the key to ending peeing in the pool is multi-pronged and includes effective swimmer education and scheduled pool breaks, especially for young swimmers. We recommend swimmer hygiene messaging be a part of all swimming lessons and that clear signage around the pool encourage sanitary practices. Certain pool regimens also can be helpful. As the National Swimming Pool Foundation (NSPF) notes in a [recent press release](#), being submerged in water stimulates the body to create more urine. NSPF offers the following commonsense recommendations to help prevent peeing in the pool:

- Swim coaches should require bathroom breaks 30-60 minutes into practice.

- Parents of young children should enforce a snack, sunscreen or bathroom “out of pool” time every 30 minutes.
- Facility managers should schedule short breaks, such as 10 minute “adult swims” or out of pool activities every hour.

Swimming is fun and the health benefits of aquatic recreation are enormous. As evidence mounts that swimmers are fouling the very waters they enter to enjoy, the time is right to confront the problem.

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