

## Backyard Pool Swimming in the Summer of Coronavirus

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### ***In a nutshell...***

More families may be investing in backyard pools in the summer of COVID-19 (coronavirus) to avoid potential infection risks at public pools. This article discusses the importance of maintaining proper pool water chemistry and ensuring good swimmer hygiene in backyard swimming pools.

If recent [pool sales](#) are an accurate indicator, many families are cooling off in backyard pools instead of the local public pool during this summer of coronavirus. Even as some public pools open, patrons may be wary of contracting the coronavirus in venues in which it is hard to maintain a social distance of at least six feet. In contrast, no social distancing is required in and around the backyard pool among family members who already live together.

### ***Good Chemistry in the Backyard Pool***

While it is a wonderful luxury to enjoy a backyard pool in the summer of coronavirus, there are certain responsibilities that go along with maintaining a “healthy” pool. For one, it is important to ensure proper pool water chemistry, particularly with regard to chlorine and pH, which are chemically linked. Those two factors are so important, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) dubs chlorine and pH “[Your Disinfection Team](#).” CDC recommends pool owners test their chlorine and pH frequently, ideally twice per day. (This is especially important if you have a large “bather load,” which this summer translates to a large family in the backyard.) Keeping the chlorine level and pH within acceptable ranges<sup>1</sup> will help ensure waterborne pathogens, including the [coronavirus](#), cannot survive to be transmitted through the water to make swimmers sick.

Many people are confused about [saltwater pools](#); a saltwater pool is actually a chlorinated pool. Ordinary table salt, for example, is sodium chloride. Chlorine is released for disinfection in a salt water pool thanks to a salt pool generator that utilizes electricity to break the chemical bonds between sodium and chlorine. So whether you purchase your chlorinated pool disinfectant or add chlorine to a salt pool via pool-grade sodium chloride, the exact same chlorine chemistry is working to help keep your water safe for swimming.



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<sup>1</sup> Free chlorine should be in the range of 1-4 parts per million (ppm) and pH should be in the range of 7.2-7.8.

## *Don't Pee in the Pool!*

“We don't swim in your toilet, so don't pee in our pool,” is a common message you might see on signs or posters around public pools. Some swimmers may consider peeing in the pool a harmless convenience and one that can be justified because there is chlorine in the water to destroy any pathogens transferred to the water. Let's set the record straight: When Johnny pees in the pool because he's having too much fun to take the time to access the bathroom, bad chemistry is set in motion.

Substances in Johnny's urine combine chemically with chlorine in the pool water to form an irritating compound that can turn swimmers' eyes red known as *trichloramine*. Thanks to Johnny, some of the chlorine that otherwise would have been available for destroying viruses and bacteria is now tied up chemically and *unavailable* for disinfection. Ironically a [strong chemical odor around the pool](#) is frequently mistaken for “too much chlorine” in the water when in fact the odor is due to trichloramine.

[Swimmer hygiene matters too](#). Not only should we not pee in the pool, we should shower before getting in the water to avoid perspiration and body oils depleting the available chlorine. [Showering before swimming](#) also helps to reduce fecal bacteria added to the water (more work for chlorine). If the kids have gotten dirty playing in the yard, or adults sweaty from yard work, consider at least a rinse under the garden hose before getting into the pool. Unfortunately, [our recent](#) survey found 30% of adult respondents admit to peeing in their own pool; 28% said they would swim within one hour of having diarrhea; and 54% don't shower before swimming.

## *Maintaining Your Inflatable Backyard Pool*

Inflatable pools are quite the rage during this summer of coronavirus. The smallest of these inflatables (and molded plastic ones), known as “kiddie” pools, have no treatment systems, and are meant to be filled with [fresh water daily and cleaned and dried between uses](#). Larger volume inflatables may come with a filter pump to circulate and filter the water of particles and debris. They may also include a chlorine disinfection system to help control pathogens in the water. I purchased one of these pools for my small Philadelphia “backyard” for my kids to play in. We have been anxiously awaiting its arrival. I plan to follow the manufacturer's guidelines and the CDC recommendations for treating the pool water.

Always follow manufacturers' directions for operating pool treatment systems. Pool test strips are a handy option for monitoring your pool's chlorine level and pH. They can be purchased in hardware, pool supply, and “big box” stores. Remember, good pool chemistry and swimmer hygiene are key to healthy swimming in the backyard pool!

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