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Precautionary advice amid rise in Cryptosporidiosis

The South Western Sydney Local Health District Public Health Unit is advising people who have had diarrhoea not to swim in pools until at least two weeks after they have fully recovered following an increase in the number of cases of cryptosporidiosis notified to the Public Health Unit.

There have been 71 cases of cryptosporidiosis notified to the Public Health Unit to date this year (as of 12 March 2017). The highest rates of infection are in children under 5 years of age, Dr Madhumati Chatterji, Acting Director, Public Health Unit said.

This is the highest year to date figure since 2009 when there was a large State-wide outbreak with more than 1141 notified cases.

“Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrhoeal disease caused by a parasitic infection of the intestine. The most common symptoms include diarrhoea, stomach cramps and sometimes fever, nausea and vomiting.

“There is no specific treatment for the condition and symptoms may last a few weeks in some people”, Dr Chatterji said.

Among the cases, a range of possible risk factors have been reported including swimming in pools, person to person contact, particularly in families and among small children (for example in child care centres) and contact with animals. In previous studies, drinking untreated water has also been identified as a risk factor.

To avoid getting infected with the parasite, the Public Health Unit advises people to:

- Always wash their hands thoroughly for 10 seconds with soap and running water after using the toilet, changing nappies, or handling animals or their manure;
- Avoid swallowing or putting pool or spa water in your mouth; and
- Not drink untreated water (e.g.: rivers, creeks, dams, surf). Bringing water to a rolling boil will kill these parasites.

To keep swimming pools free from contamination, it is vital that people do not swim in a pool or enter a spa until at least two weeks after they have completely recovered from a diarrhoeal illness.

The Public Health Unit recommends parents do the following things to avoid pool contamination:

- Children who are not toilet-trained should wear swimming nappies or waterproof tight-fitting pants over swimmers;
- Change nappies in a bathroom and not at the poolside as germs can spread to surfaces or objects in and around the pool and spread illness; if a dedicated nappy change table is used, the surfaces should be sanitised after use so as not to be a potential source of infection for the next child

- Wash their hands with soap and water after changing a child's nappy.

Anyone concerned about their symptoms should contact their GP.

The NSW Health Fact Sheet on Cryptosporidiosis can be found at:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/cryptosporidiosis.aspx>