



## NATIONAL CONSUMERS LEAGUE

1701 K Street, NW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20006

PHONE (202) 835-3323 FAX (202) 835-0747 [www.ncinet.org](http://www.ncinet.org)

### Healthy Pools Survey National Consumers League May 2004

The National Consumers League commissioned Opinion Research Corporation to conduct a national random sample survey on consumer perceptions and experience regarding cleanliness of swimming pools. This report presents the findings of a telephone survey conducted among a national probability sample of 1,009 adults comprising 512 men and 497 women 18 years of age and older, living in private households in the continental United States. Interviewing was conducted May 6-9, 2004. The approximate sampling tolerance is +/- 3 percent.

#### General Findings

- Of respondents who use swimming pools, a majority have children in the household. Generally, those who do not go swimming have not had the opportunity or just do not enjoy it. **A very small percentage report that they have not gone swimming because the pool was not clean and sanitary**, and because they think that pools are unsafe.
- About 40 percent believe that it is somewhat likely or very likely that **someone can get sick from swimming in a swimming pool**. More women than men say that this is very likely.
- When asked who is **most responsible for assuring that a pool—public or private—is clean and sanitary**, most respondents feel that the owner, manager, or maintenance staff was most responsible. Only 22 percent place the most responsibility on the people who use the pool, including those with children. 36 percent place least responsibility on the users of the pool.
- Respondents were asked about several conditions in a pool.
  - 94 percent agree that any **fecal accident** should be reported immediately to the lifeguard, pool operator, or owner. However, 22 percent say it is okay to change a **child's diaper** at poolside. 24 percent of those with children under 12 feel that

this is okay. Almost 3 of 4 respondents (72 percent) are concerned if a diapered child is in the pool you are swimming in. 4 out of 5 agree that you should **never swim in a pool if you have diarrhea**. Yet 23 percent feel that **“a little urine in the pool doesn’t hurt anybody.”**

- A large majority (88 percent) agree that you should use **soap and water** after using the bathroom before going into the pool. And 74 percent say that you should **always shower** before going into the pool.
  - 21 percent said that if you can **smell the chlorine** in a pool, it must be okay to swim in it. One in 5 believe that chlorine kills all germs in the pool, and 15 percent actually believe that pool water is sterile. In fact, chlorine does kill germs that can cause illness in pool water; but it takes time. Some germs can survive in a properly treated pool for days.
  - **One in 5 respondents agree “it is okay to have some pool water in my mouth or to swallow the pool water.”**
- **How to detect a healthy pool**
    - A majority (89 percent) of the respondents say that a **daily pool water testing log** filled out and available for public inspection and a report (84 percent) on pool disinfection and quality control posted in a public place are ways to detect a healthy pool.
    - About **4 out of 10 believe that smelling chlorine detected a healthy pool** and about 13 percent said that if the sides of the pool are slippery, that is a healthy pool. In fact, the heavy odor means that unhealthy chloramines have formed in the water. A well-maintained pool has little odor, but it does have smooth pool sides.
- **Experiences at a pool**
    - Those respondents who report actual experience at a pool reveal that some of the signs that indicate a healthy pool were **not necessarily in practice**. Only 59 percent say that the pool was always clear and that “I can see the drain at the bottom of the pool.” **Less than half (48 percent) report that the bathrooms are always well maintained and that adequate soap and water are available**. Only 39 percent of the respondents report that the pool operators always seemed well trained. And only **1/3 report that the sides of the pool were never slippery**.

- Just 29 percent report that everyone is required to take a shower before entering the pool. And **only 24 percent say that they always take a shower with soap and hot water before entering the pool.** Just a little over a quarter of the pools always have a clean diaper changing room.
- Only 1/5 of the respondents say there was always a report posted that indicated **when the pool was last disinfected and how often it is monitored.** Just 15 percent report that there was no smell of chlorine.
- **Reactions after swimming in a pool**
  - 72 percent report red eyes; 32 percent ear infections; 20 percent rash or itchy skin; 10 percent eye infections; 6 percent respiratory or urinary tract infection; 5 percent skin infections; and 4 percent diarrhea.
  - One in five had none of these or did not know.