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POOL OF KNOWLEDGE: EDUCATE PARENTS ON SWIMMING AND EYE SAFETY

The Wisconsin Optometric Association offers tips for parents to safeguard their little swimmer's sight

MADISON, Wis. – With the start of summer, many local public pools and swimming parks will reopen. This is the perfect time to remind swimmers about eye safety.

According to Dr. Christ Marquardt, President of the WOA, "There are several types of bacteria and other microorganisms in pool water, especially public pools, which can cause eye irritation or in some cases, these organisms can cause a serious sight-threatening infection."

May 21 – 27, 2018 was designated by the Centers for Disease control and Prevention as [Healthy and Safe Swimming Week](#), which the CDC hopes will raise the public's awareness of good eye health while in the water. According to Dr. Marquardt, "As Summer begins, we start to see more patients – more children – who have irritated eyes from swimming due to the chemicals used in pools." Whether they are complaining of red, irritated eyes from pool chemicals or seeking advice on whether they should wear their contact lenses in the water, patients turn to doctors of optometry for advice on how to be safe while swimming in pools.

According to a [CDC report](#) published May 18 in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, about 500 disease outbreaks in treated recreational water were reported between 2001 and 2014. Those outbreaks caused more than 27,200 cases of infection and eight deaths in 46 states and Puerto Rico. Pathogens (disease-causing microorganisms) accounted for most of the outbreaks (94 percent), while chemicals in the water were linked to the remaining outbreaks. The CDC report also notes most outbreaks occurred in hotels (32 percent), followed by community/municipality/public park (23 percent), club/recreational facility (14 percent) and water parks (11 percent).

Dr. Marquardt tells his patients that even though good disinfection systems are in place for pools and hot tubs, there are still bacteria in the water that can adhere to their contact lens and cause eye infections.

Edward Bennett, O.D., M.S. Ed., is chair of the American Optometric Association's Contact Lens and Cornea Section (CLCS) and notes the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recommended contact lenses not be exposed to any form of water, whether it's from a swimming pool, wells, showers or the kitchen tap. "There are many types of bacteria and other microorganisms in pool water and, if the eye is already irritated, these organisms can cause a serious sight-threatening infection, often called a corneal ulcer," Dr. Bennett says. "Although rare, the most devastating such infection is '[Acanthamoeba keratitis](#),' which may result in the need for a corneal transplant (in the most severe cases). These organisms can become attached to the contact lenses, which increases the risk for infection. In these cases, the eyes will be red and painful, and vision will be blurred. Therefore, you should immediately contact your eye care doctor for treatment.

Doctors of optometry recommend:

- Removing contact lenses before swimming, showering or using a hot tub.
- Using watertight goggles, if contact lenses must be worn in water.
- Disposing of contact lenses immediately, if they are exposed to water.

For more information, contact an optometrist in your area: <http://woa-eyes.org/members>.

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 WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.