

The Model Aquatic Health Code: Making Swimming Healthy and Safe

Who's Ready for a Swim?

People in the United States make more than 300 million trips a year to pools and other places to swim, making swimming one of the nation's most popular sporting activities. And two and a half hours per week of aerobic physical activity, such as swimming, can decrease the risk for chronic illnesses. Yet some people are swimming in pools that are not safe. In fact, a recent study found that 12% of public pools inspected were closed for serious violations. Waterborne disease outbreaks are on the rise, drowning continues to injure and claim the lives of far too many, and swimming-related emergency room visits are in the thousands each year. Many of these tragedies occur in public pools, waterparks, and other aquatic venues—many of them are preventable.



Can the Model Aquatic Health Code Help Make Swimming Safer?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state and local public health officials, and industry experts are developing a Model Aquatic Health Code (MAHC). This is a guidance document that can help local and state authorities make swimming and other water activities healthier and safer. The MAHC offers guidelines for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of public swimming pools, hot tubs and spas, waterparks, and other aquatic facilities.

Specifically, the MAHC can help reduce:

- **Outbreaks of waterborne illnesses.**

These include gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic, and wound infections resulting from exposure to contaminated swimming water. These illnesses can pose serious and life-threatening risk to the very young, the elderly, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune function.

- **Drowning.**

Unintentional drowning is a leading cause of injury death for children 1–14 years of age, second only to motor vehicle crashes.

- **Emergency room visits.**

Injuries associated with pool chemicals account for more than 4,000 emergency room visits each year. More than 30,000 children under the age of 10 visit the emergency room for swimming-related issues each year.

- **Closures of pools, water parks, and other aquatic venues.**

Pools are sometimes closed during inspection due to imminent public health hazards. A recent CDC analysis found that 12% of public pool inspections resulted in immediate closure due to serious violations.



Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

How Can You Use the MAHC?

- The MAHC provides language that state and local agencies and policymakers can use to develop or update codes for swimming pools and other facilities.
- The MAHC is a guidance document, not a federal law. State and local agencies can decide how to use the MAHC. They can adopt, adapt, and incorporate the entire MAHC or any of its components.
- The MAHC helps local and state agencies incorporate science-based practices into their pool programs without having to spend a great deal of time recreating the wheel.

Will the MAHC Change?

The MAHC is free, and stakeholders will have regular opportunities to give input to update and improve it. These opportunities will ensure that the MAHC is updated regularly so that it remains scientifically relevant.

Resources

- Model Aquatic Health Code website: <http://www.cdc.gov/mahc/>
- CDC Healthy Swimming website: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming>
- Recreational Water Illness and Injury Prevention Week Resources: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/rwi-prevention-week/>
- Recreational Water Resources for Environmental Health Professionals: <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Topics/recreationalwater.htm>

Model Aquatic Health Code Online

Access the MAHC language, scientific rationale behind the language, references, and other resources online.

MAHC module topics:

- Administering a Regulatory Pool Inspection Program
- Contamination Burden
- Design and Construction of Aquatic Facilities
- Disinfection and Water Quality
- Hygiene Facilities (bathrooms at aquatic facilities)
- Lifeguarding and Bather Supervision
- Maintaining and Operating Pools and Other Facilities
- Monitoring and Testing
- Recirculation Systems and Filtration
- Risk Management and Safety
- Training for Facility Operators
- Ventilation and Air Quality

