



Media Release
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Selwyn Aquatic Centre Closed Temporarily

Selwyn Aquatic Centre has been temporarily closed to the public following an outbreak of cryptosporidium, a bug which causes severe stomach cramps and diarrhoea.

Nine cases of cryptosporidium have been confirmed in the Selwyn District in the last month. Nationally, 877 cryptosporidium cases were reported in New Zealand in 2012.

Dr Alistair Humphrey, Canterbury Medical Officer of Health, says Community and Public Health is in the process of interviewing all people with confirmed cryptosporidiosis in an attempt to identify a common source.

"While we are still looking into the source of the outbreak, our preliminary investigations suggest that it may have been spread by someone with cryptosporidium swimming at the Selwyn Aquatic Centre," Dr Humphrey says.

Six of the nine cases are from people who have gone swimming at the Selwyn Aquatic Centre, and another case had two siblings who had been swimming at the Centre.

Dr Humphrey congratulated the Selwyn District Council for its decision to close the Aquatic Centre until more is known on the outbreak.

"We don't yet know for sure how the disease is spreading, proactively closing the pool is the responsible thing to do."

"Cryptosporidium is a difficult bug to remove from a swimming pool and the Aquatic Centre is doing the safest thing by closing the pool. It is important that the pool does not become a vector for further spread."

Dr Humphrey says to reduce the risk of further spread it is essential for people who have diarrhoea to stay out of swimming pools for at least two weeks after their diarrhoea has finished.

"People with diarrhoea who enter swimming pools are putting the community at risk," says Dr Humphrey.

"It is important to ask people, especially children, whether they have had diarrhoea *before* you take them to the pool. Discussing this issue in the pool reception or in the changing rooms is too late."

Selwyn Aquatic Centre Manager Kathy Moore says the pool has a poolsafe policy in place, which advises customers not to swim if they or their children have been unwell or have experienced diarrhoea in the past two weeks.

However, cryptosporidium is known to be a difficult organism to kill and treat when it is brought into swimming pools by a member of the public.

“Although the Aquatic Centre operates to best quality water treatment guidelines cryptosporidium is resistant to chlorination and can survive standard pool water quality treatment methods. A number of other pools in New Zealand have experienced problems with this organism despite having good water filtration and treatment systems in place,” Kathy says.

“The water in the pools in the centre will be removed from the pools, discarded and replaced with fresh water. Pool systems will also be repeatedly flushed to clear out traces of cryptosporidium. The pool will not be reopened until test results confirm the water is free from cryptosporidium.”

The pool was closed yesterday when a power outage prevented the facility from opening. Kathy says the pool will remain closed until test results have been returned confirming the water is safe. This may take around two weeks. Aquatic Centre staff will be contacting customers who have enrolled in the swim school programme about the closure.

Cryptosporidium is an organism that can cause gastrointestinal illness with diarrhea. It can be contracted from contact with farm animals, by drinking untreated water, from contact with faeces (for example through nappy changing), in food or spread in swimming pools. It is more commonly reported in rural areas and reported cases peak in the springtime.

Common symptoms of Cryptosporidium include diarrhoea (often watery), stomach cramps and abdominal pain, lack of appetite, and weight loss. To prevent dehydration it is important to drink plenty of fluids while the diarrhoea lasts. If you or someone in your family has these symptoms, phone your usual General Practice number anytime of the day or night for advice on what to do.

The District Health Board and Selwyn Aquatic Centre will continue to work together on this issue.

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