



Aquatic Consulting Services

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Pool Tip #31: Skin Rashes

Skin problems brought about by swimming in pools are usually caused by moisture loss, halogen sensitivities, bacterial infections, or harmful marine life.

Moisture loss can cause dry skin, eczema, and red, itchy, chapped, blistery skin. In addition to limiting the amount of time spent in the water, common treatments include applying Dermasil, Curel or other over the counter creams that replace lipids; creams containing the drug doxepin, or Bag Balm or other similar lanolin based veterinary antiseptics. Dry skin seems to be a bigger problem for swimmers who spend extended amounts of time in the water, and usually get worse during the winter months.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and a study conducted by dermatologists in New York City, between 5% and 17% of frequent swimmers who swim in pools treated with chlorine, bromine, or potassium iodide halogen compounds develop contact dermatitis and halogen hypersensitivities as a result of the exposure. Bathers who've developed chemical sensitivities should avoid swimming in pools treated with the particular halogen.

Bacterial infections, such as those caused by the bacterium *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, often cause red, bumpy, itchy rashes that resemble poison ivy or a case of the measles. Treatment includes staying out of the contaminated water, implementing better deck, equipment and pool water sanitation - oxidation procedures; and instituting maintenance procedures to rid the pool of the bacteria.

Marine life larvae, often from jellyfish, can become trapped in swimsuit fabric while swimming in the ocean. Showering while wearing the suit or immediately getting into a fresh water swimming pool may cause the larvae to discharge venom. You may develop a red painful itch, hives, blisters, and lymph glands may become swollen. If stung by the nematocysts, don't rub, you'll only spread the nematocysts and increase the affected area. Apply antihistamines or corticosteroid creams for relief of symptoms. Applying papaya extract, or papain -- one of the main ingredients found in meat tenderizers to your skin will dilute and break down the high protein acid in the stinging cells, and reduce the amount of poisonous venom released. Removing and washing swim suits after leaving the ocean and before getting into a swimming pool will help eliminate this problem.