



# Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • [www.scdhec.gov](http://www.scdhec.gov)

## *Naegleria fowleri*

- *Naegleria fowleri* is an ameba (one-celled organism) that causes a very rare, but severe infection of the brain.
- It is found in warm freshwater lakes, rivers and soil. It has RARELY been associated with swimming pools with inadequate levels of chlorine, as well as flushing sinuses with contaminated water.
- *Naegleria fowleri* enters through the nose and once in the brain, it usually causes a fatal infection.
- Symptoms usually start 1 to 7 days after infection, but can be out to 15 days and include headache, fever, nausea and vomiting, and a stiff neck. Later symptoms include confusion, lack of attention, loss of balance, seizures and hallucinations.
- DHEC recommends that people seek immediate medical attention after swimming in fresh water if you experience onset of headache, nausea, vomiting, high fever, and neck stiffness.
- The infection cannot be spread from person to person.
- You cannot become infected by drinking contaminated water.
- Illness almost always results in death, with a 95% mortality rate.
- Illness progresses rapidly, causing death in 1 to 12 days.
- *Naegleria fowleri* is not found in salt water, such as the ocean.
- It is extremely rare. From 2001 to 2010, 32 infections were reported in the US. This is in contrast to the 36,000 deaths due to drowning that occurred from 1996 to 2005.
- Infections occur mainly in the summer months, especially when it is hot for prolonged periods of time, resulting in higher water temperatures and lower water levels.
- Infection can be prevented by:
  - Avoiding water-related activities in warm, untreated, or poorly treated water.

If this is not possible or desirable:

- Avoiding water related activities in warm freshwater during periods of high water temperature and low water levels.
- Holding the nose shut or using nose clips when taking part in water related activities.
- Avoiding digging in or stirring up sediment surrounding warm, fresh water.

Additional information on *Naegleria fowleri* can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/naegleria/>