

## **SCRIPT – PRINT - Safe to Swim during COVID-19?**

### **Play it Smart When Heading to the Pool This Summer**

One of the best ways to make a splash every summer is by heading to your nearest swimming pool. With the health concerns surrounding COVID-19, some community pools are foregoing opening at all this summer while swimmers are left wondering if it is safe to take the plunge at all.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there is no evidence that COVID-19 can spread to people through the water used in pools, hot tubs, or water playgrounds. Proper operation and disinfection of these areas should kill the virus that causes COVID-19. Lakes and oceans are also safe from a transmission standpoint due to the vast size of the bodies of water.

“It’s nice because families need to get out and do activities and this is a safe activity that they can do,” said Dr. Robin Punsalan, pediatrician, OSF HealthCare. “Your public pools may start to open as we transition into Phase 4 soon and those with limited capacity should be safe to go and use. Now your private pool is going to be safer than your public one because you’re also worried about who is going to be around you. So social distancing rules still apply. You should stay in your family unit and stay six feet away from other people. If you can’t maintain the six feet distance and you’re not in the pool you should be wearing a mask.”

It’s vital to maintain that distance from others in the pool. Being in close proximity to someone who is coughing, sneezing, or even laughing means a potential swapping of droplets, leaving those in the pool at a higher risk.

Just because you feel safe in the water, remember you can still come in contact with COVID-19 around the pool, especially from person-to-person contact or by touching a contaminated surface. Dr. Punsalan recommends bringing personal items you’ll need for the day such as separate drink bottles, pool toys and goggles for each family member.

“Bring the usual items like your towel, your sunscreen, but I would also make sure to bring your hand sanitizer, so if you are touching things that are shared among other people you can sanitize both you and your family,” said Dr. Robin Punsalan, pediatrician, OSF HealthCare. “And you should bring your own food, snacks and drinks. Water fountains, if it’s a public pool, won’t be accessible.”

Besides COVID-19, there are other safety measures to consider when keeping family and friends safe in and around the pool. According to the CDC, about 10 people die from unintentional drowning every day in this country. Of these, two will be children aged 14 or younger. Drowning is the fifth leading cause of unintentional injury death for people of all ages, and the second leading cause of injury death for children ages 1 to 14.

"Never swim alone. Always supervise your children - even two seconds they can get behind your back and be found in water," said Dr. Robin Punsalan, pediatrician – OSF HealthCare. "And it doesn't have to be a pool. It can be a baby pool instead of an inground pool and even two inches is enough to drown in. So always make sure kids are supervised around water and life vests definitely save lives. They still need supervision even with a life vest on."

Don't forget about sunscreen, either. Dr. Punsalan recommends every two hours applying sunscreen, especially a water resistant product if you are going to be swimming. And higher numbers don't always translate to better protection, she said, but have one that is at least 30 to 50 SPF. Follow these tips for a healthy and safe summer swim season.