Editor’s Note: NEHA strives to provide up-to-date and relevant information on environmental health and to build partnerships in the profession. In pursuit of these goals, we feature a column from the Environmental Health Services Branch (EHSB) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in every issue of the Journal.

In this column, EHSB and guest authors from across CDC will highlight a variety of concerns, opportunities, challenges, and successes that we all share in environmental public health. EHSB’s objective is to strengthen the role of state, local, and national environmental health programs and professionals to anticipate, identify, and respond to adverse environmental exposures and the consequences of these exposures for human health. The services being developed through EHSB include access to topical, relevant, and scientific information; consultation; and assistance to environmental health specialists, sanitarians, and environmental health professionals and practitioners.

The conclusions in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CAPT Charles Otto is the innovation team leader in CDC’s Environmental Health Services Branch. Michele Hlavsa is chief of CDC’s Healthy Swimming Program in CDC’s Domestic Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Team.

This month’s column updates the medley of healthy swimming initiatives by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Let’s dive right into

- Recreational Water Illness (RWI) Prevention Week 2010,
- the New Pool Inspection Data Study and
- the Model Aquatic Health Code (MAHC).

RWI Prevention Week 2010

RWI Prevention Week will be celebrated May 24–30, 2010, in many jurisdictions across the United States and at CDC. This week highlights the public’s significant role in practicing healthy swimming behaviors and showcases one of the many important environmental health (EH) programs in our partner state and local agencies. Support materials, including a publicity tool kit, are available on the Healthy Swimming Web site at www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/index.html.

New for RWI Prevention Week 2009 were two short CDC videos: “In the Swim of Things” and “Healthy Swimming Is No Accident.” These videos can be used by our public health partners and broadcast to promote healthy swimming. Additionally, more than 250,000 copies of new English and Spanish healthy swimming brochures (Figure 1) and pool chemical safety posters (Figure 2) were distributed. Order yours free today on the Healthy Swimming Web site.

Has RWI Prevention Week made a difference? The annual event has brought national, regional, and local media attention to healthy swimming behaviors and to the important EH programs that protect the health of our communities. Each year related publicity has grown substantially in the number of printed and electronic media pieces and its geographic spread across the country. RWI Prevention Week 2009 saw the largest number of participating jurisdictions to date, and it even broke into the realm of blogs. Participating partners can showcase their important state and local EH roles in RWI prevention through their local media.

Successful efforts that prevent RWIs are at least in part based on the following:

- communication (e.g., within and among health departments and with community partners such as pool operators),
- education of the swimming public, and
- regulation.

The experience of colleagues in three jurisdictions underscores this. In 2007, state and local EH specialists and epidemiologists in Idaho, Pennsylvania, and Utah collaborated to investigate and control large RWI outbreaks of cryptosporidiosis in their respective jurisdictions. To prevent such outbreaks in 2008, each jurisdiction developed and implemented proactive
measures (e.g., www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/default.aspx?TabId=113, www.health.montcopa.org, and www.nocrypto.org) before the start of the 2008 traditional summer swim season, with the biggest push occurring during RWI Prevention Week. As a result, relatively few sporadic cryptosporidiosis cases were identified in each of the jurisdictions in 2008. Communication and education are core to RWI Prevention Week programming and have contributed to improving aquatic health in these communities.

**Aquatic Health Inspection Report Study**

The Morbidity Mortality Weekly Report to be issued during RWI Prevention Week 2010 will include a report on the new Pool Inspection Data Study, the second leg of our healthy swimming medley. This study is a repeat of the popular and informative—but limited—2002 study of 22,000 pool inspections from six state and local jurisdictions (CDC, 2003).

The new study represents a collaborative effort with 19 EH programs (12 local and seven state) that contributed approximately 150,000 pool inspection reports from 2008 for analysis. The 2010 NEHA Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition (June 6–9 in Albuquerque, New Mexico) Aquatic Health Educational Track will include Elizabeth Dunbar’s (study coordinator) presentation on the study’s findings and how they can be utilized in evidence-based EH program decision making.

**Model Aquatic Health Code**

The MAHC is the third and the final leg in this healthy swimming medley. Appropriate, effective regulation can help prevent RWIs. The MAHC was described in this column in May 2009 (Beach, 2009). Over the past year, a dozen technical committees with over 150 volunteers have spent thousands of hours gathering scientific and technical evidence on how to make aquatics healthier.

Now is the time for you to join the MAHC’s aquatic health team if you have not been involved. Draft MAHC modules are being posted on the CDC Healthy Swimming Web site for public comment. Your comments on each part of the MAHC draft will make a better product available to all EH aquatic health programs. Review the draft modules and find out more about MAHC on the Healthy Swimming Web site.

As in real swimming events, many challenges exist for local, state, and national aquatic health programs. Budgets, program reorganization and elimination, and other health priorities tested us in 2009, yet together we were able to build on the progress.
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References