



August 2, 2018

Sarah Chaires, Family Nurse Practitioner
Carolina Swims Foundation and Club Kick Start

Dear Ms. Chaires:

People in the United States swim over 300 million times a year in pools, oceans, lakes, rivers, and hot tubs/spas, making swimming the fourth most popular sports activity. Swimming and aquatic recreation also affords many health and social benefits that improve the quality of life. However, over the past few decades, public pools, hot tubs/spas, and waterparks have also been associated with significant increases in disease outbreaks and the continued occurrence of drowning and injuries. Drowning continues to be a leading cause of unintentional injury-related death for almost 4000 people every year, particularly for children ages 1–14 years. Injuries linked to pool chemicals accounted for 3,000–5,000 emergency department visits per year. Nearly 500 disease outbreaks linked to pools, hot tubs/spas, and water playgrounds occurred from 2000 to 2014. The leading cause of these outbreaks, *Cryptosporidium* or “Crypto”, is chlorine tolerant and has caused outbreaks that sicken thousands. In addition, recent studies find pool operation is variable, with about 1 out of 8 public pool inspections and 1 out of 7 public hot tub/spa inspections resulting in immediate closure due to serious public health violations.

To address these public health threats, CDC convened a national workshop of public health officials, the pool industry, and academics to make recommendations on how to address these issues in the future. The group asked CDC to lead a broad national coalition of public health and industry experts to create national guidance on design, construction, and operation of public aquatic facilities to prevent drowning, injuries, and the spread of illness. After 7 years, this guidance document, called the Model Aquatic Health Code (MAHC) was released in 2014. The MAHC is a model and guide for local and state agencies needing to update or implement codes/laws governing the design, construction, and operation of public pools and spas. The non-profit, Council for the Model Aquatic Health Code (CMAHC), was organized in 2014 to partner with CDC to manage updates to, and promote voluntary adoption of, CDC’s MAHC. As a result, a robust national process for keeping the MAHC up-to-date with the latest technology, science, and best practices was created. This update process resulted in the 2016, and the recently released 2018, MAHC editions (CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/mahc/editions/current.html>).

The MAHC’s vision is “Healthy and Safe Aquatic Experiences for Everyone.” The availability of the MAHC provides state and local agencies the best available guidance for protecting public health so they can use it to voluntarily create or update their swimming pool codes. CDC and national experts believe this guidance is a leap forward in promoting healthy and safe aquatics for the future, particularly in vulnerable populations like young children. The MAHC addresses key issues to reduce illness, drowning, and injury that are not addressed by many health codes. These include 1) effective treatments to kill “Crypto”, 2) re-thinking lifeguarding based on what lifeguards can and cannot see, 3) preventing all-too-common chemical accidents, 4) requiring training for key operation and lifeguarding staff, 5) improvements to promote swimmer hygiene, 6) increased fencing heights to block access by young children, and 7) daily checklists to prevent potential health and safety issues. As a result, the MAHC may be longer than many other pool codes, but it is necessary to ensure aquatics is prepared for the continuing and new public health issues of the future. In addition, use of the MAHC reduces the resources needed by public health officials in developing and updating existing codes.

CDC and its national coalition of partners have put thousands of hours of public health and aquatics experts' time into making the MAHC the pool guidance of the future. Of course, adoption is voluntary, but CDC strongly encourages jurisdictions to use the MAHC as a resource, whether adopting the MAHC in total or in part. Use of the MAHC is supported by the National Environmental Health Association, The Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, the National Association of City and County Health Officials, and the National Swimming Pool Foundation. Although the adoption process can be lengthy, CDC currently knows of four major MAHC adoptions and four partial adoptions by four states, one county, and three U.S. government agencies. At least 22 other states and counties are in the process of, or considering, adoption. CDC stands ready to assist state and local agencies and partners who are considering use or adoption of the MAHC so we can all enjoy healthy and safe aquatics experiences.

If North Carolina decides to use the MAHC to improve child health and safety, we are willing to help however we can. I look forward to hearing how we can help in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J Beach". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael J. Beach, Ph.D.
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