

Child's death may be linked to cryptosporidium

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By JANET ST. JAMES / WFAA-TV

ARLINGTON - As cryptosporidium continues to be found in pools across North Texas, it may also be linked to a child's recent death.

The parasite will be investigated as a possible contributor in the death of a 6-year-old girl, who died Tuesday.

The pool parasite is spreading across North Texas and infecting dozens from Tarrant to Dallas and Collin counties.

Thursday, Garland reported that visitors from both Hawaiian Falls and Surf and Swim tested positive for the parasite.

The outbreak started in Fort Worth's Burger's Lake, which was shut down on July 16. Days later, the city of Fort Worth hyper-chlorinated their pools. Cryptosporidium was then discovered in Arlington on July 23 and in Dallas on the 25th.

Days later, Plano hyper-chlorinated one of their pools.

Health officials admit there have also been cases at smaller public facilities that haven't gotten attention.

"This is changing hour by hour as we get more cases reported," said Jason Chessher, Garland Health Department. "We have closed three pools previously, two day cares and one semi-public pool at a homeowners association."

Because there are so many places to spread the parasite, News 8 wanted to know if there's anything that could stop the outbreak now. News 8 asked Tarrant County health experts leading the investigation about the possibility of shutting down all public water parks and pools.

"We've already had cases of people transmitting it from taking care of other people who are sick," said David Jefferson, Tarrant County environmental health manager. "So, even closing down all the pools would not completely eradicate it."

A potent concentration of chemicals can kill cryptosporidium.

Tarrant and Dallas counties' health departments have both recommended all public facilities hyper-chlorinate every week. But without declaring a public health emergency, they can't order compliance. So far, there have not been enough cases to do that. There is also no guarantee an infected swimmer couldn't re-contaminate the water right after the treatment.

So, what can be done?

"If you're ill, if you have diarrhea, you should not be swimming in public pools," Johnson said. "If you're taking care of someone with diarrhea, you need to remember the old fashioned rule about washing your hands [and] taking care of your basic sanitation. These are the things that stop crypto."

Health authorities say they expect secondary cases to continue to rise until school starts in a few weeks, which is when most public water parks and pools close voluntarily.