



Rich Cooley/Daily photos

Darla Sue Moomaw, manager of the Woodstock Pool, takes a water sample along the edge of the pool on Tuesday. Moomaw and staff members take water samples for chlorine and pH on a daily basis. Town officials closed the pool Monday after fecal contamination was discovered in the water.

# Safety first

## Pool maintenance ensures summer fun

By Josette Keelor

Monday was one of the hottest days of the summer, but Woodstock Pool wasn't open.

Closed for a 24-hour period after fecal contamination was discovered, the pool reopened at normal time Tuesday. But on a hot summer day, 24 hours can seem a lot longer and with a few tips from aquatics professionals, swimmers can plan ahead to get the most out of their summer swimming experience.

When health risks like this occur, Woodstock Assistant Town Manager Angela Clem said pool staff members follow policy determined by protocol from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Normally, in such a situation, pools might close for only an hour, but she said the Woodstock pool remained closed for a 24-hour period because of the type of fecal matter involved.

"We just wanted to err on the safe side," she said.

During the closure, pool staff removed what contaminants they could, treated and filtered the pool water and backwashed the filter.

Incidents like this aren't uncommon, but Tiffany Walker, recreation and aquatics coordinator for the Warren County Community Center in Front Royal, said there are ways patrons and pool staff can attempt to prevent them as often as they can.

Those planning to swim should shower before entering the pool and wash their hands after using the restroom, Walker said. Parents should also encourage young children to take regular restroom breaks.

A lot of kids don't like to get out of the water to use the bathroom, she said.

Children still in diapers must wear swim diapers under their

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swimsuits.

"We don't allow regular diapers in the pool," Walker said. "They disintegrate and that's when you get a lot of your contamination."

But accidents happen, and when they do she said the pool follows protocol.

"We shut down for about an hour and we shock the pool to get the contamination out," Walker said. "We put muriatic acid in, and it's a chemical that kills the contamination."

She said pools also might use a shock-free treatment that allows swimmers to return to the water after 30 minutes instead of an hour.

These steps are used in addition to regular chlorine treatments, which the pool runs constantly throughout the day. Staff members use pH strips to test that chlorine levels are where they should be — between 7.2 and 7.6 on the pH scale for the Claude A. Stokes Community Swimming Pool in Gertrude Miller Municipal Park on Bing Crosby Road, and between 7.0 and 7.5 at Woodstock Pool in W.O. Riley Park, 540 Park Ave.

The right water pH is important for two reasons, the CDC reports at its website

<http://tinyurl.com/p2x9eno>.

First, pH affects the germ-killing power of chlorine, so it's less effective as it rises. Second, a swimmer's body has a pH between 7.2 and 7.8, so

water outside of that range will begin to irritate swimmers' eyes and skin.

Pool pumps regulate chlorine levels for aquatic facilities, Walker said, though chlorine levels can change from one day to another. Sun affects levels, as do too much water in the pool, a leak in the pool or too much water splashed out of the pool. In any of those cases, staff can shut off the pump and regulate levels manually.

"If the chlorine's too high, we wouldn't allow anyone in the pool," Walker said.

At proper levels, chlorine disinfects water, removing about 97 percent of what might find its way into the pool, Walker said. Additionally, pool operators shock the pool every Saturday and clarify and algicide the pool on Sundays.

Clem said Woodstock Pool is lucky to benefit from three pool operators on staff.

"That's unusual for a pool our size," she said. Two of them sought out higher credentials than were required for their jobs, she said. "They've gone above and beyond their job, so we're very proud of our staff."

Fecal contamination happens about once a season in Woodstock, but Clem said community safety for all swimmers starts at home.

"If they're sick, please don't come to the pool."

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