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Will Public and Community Pools Open This Summer?

The CDC has issued guidelines for pools and swim clubs, but many are still waiting to hear from state government to see if they can operate

BY RONNIE KOENIG | Published: May 27, 2020

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The CDC has issued guidelines (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/parks-rec/aquatic-venues.html>) for public pools, hot tubs and water playgrounds during the coronavirus outbreak. While the traditional Memorial Day openings were canceled, many families are still waiting to hear if their community pools will open at all this summer – and if they do, what it would look like.

While it is difficult to imagine social distancing at the pool, the CDC has outlined how to do just that. It still remains to be seen if local officials will deem it feasible to open, or if we'll be stuck with a backyard slip n' slide instead.

The CDC recommends:

- **Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette**—encouraging staff and swimmers to frequently wash hands and cover coughs and sneezes.
- **Cloth face coverings**—wearing a mask in social situations but NOT in the water as this can obstruct breathing.
- **Staying home**—taking the initiative to self-isolate if you have been exposed to the virus.
- **Adequate supplies**—pools should make sure they have enough soap, hand sanitizer, paper towels and other supplies.
- **Signs and messages**—pools should post signs and use social media to encourage social distancing, hand-washing and other ways to stop the spread.

According to the CDC: “There is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 (<https://www.njfamily.com/category/coronavirus/>) can be spread to people through the water in pools, hot tubs, spas, or water play areas. Proper operation and maintenance (including disinfection with chlorine and bromine) of these facilities should inactivate the virus in the water.”

The same rules go for backyard pools. Owners should keep them well-maintained and chlorinated, limit the number of guests and observe social distancing.

The bigger issue, which may keep community pools from opening, is that it's hard to control large gatherings of people there.

“It’s unlikely that COVID-19 will be spread by the water in the pool, as adequate chlorine should prevent that from occurring, but the virus can still be transmitted by coming too close to someone who is infected, whether in a pool or somewhere else,” Daniel Hart (<https://www.summitmedicalgroup.com/doctor/dhart/>), MD, Director of Infection Prevention, Summit Medical Group, told New Jersey Family.

“While there is ongoing community spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, it is important for individuals to take steps to ensure health and safety: wear a mask or face covering except in the water, maintain physical distancing of at least six feet at all times, don’t share goggles or other gear and wash your hands frequently and thoroughly.”

Ben Stentz, executive director of Princeton Recreation (<https://www.leaguelineup.com/welcome.asp?url=princetonrecreation>), said that they have been waiting for official guidelines from the state as to whether they can open the popular Community Pool in Princeton. As of Friday, they announced they will decide by June 15 on whether the pool will open at all this summer. (If it does, it would not be until July 15.)

"It's funny, the goal of what we do at recreation is to bring people together," Stentz told New Jersey Family. "Now we're trying to figure out how to not bring people together so closely."

Stentz said there were a few strategies the pool staff are considering employing, including breaking up any clustered seating, removing the plastic chairs they normally offer for use and having patrons bring their own chairs, and adding signage at the front gates and by the lockers reminding people about social distancing. He said the biggest challenge would be how to keep people socially distanced in the water.

The pool would also need to operate at a limited capacity, possibly at only 25 percent of the normal load. Stentz says that a pool experience would be "back to the basics" likely with no concessions available.

"You would take a dip and go home," he said. "It's going to be very different."

"Memorial Day was really sad," Stephanie Fekete, president of Fox Hollow Swim Club (<https://www.teamunify.com/Home.jsp?team=recfhsc>) and vice president of the Cherry Hill Association of Pools told New Jersey Family. "While the weather was not perfect, the excitement of opening the club and the yearly competition of who would be the first to jump in the freezing water was truly missed. It was nice to hear from many of our Fox Hollow members over the weekend and to know that I was not alone in missing my happy place. I cannot remember the last Memorial Day weekend I have not spent at Fox Hollow or on a baseball field, so my house is definitely ready for some normalcy. I think the kids need it the most."
