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Rare Amebic Illness Confirmed

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has confirmed a case of primary amebic meningoencephalitis, or PAM, in a Central Texas child.

The illness was caused by *Naegleria fowleri*, an ameba common to almost all lakes, ponds, rivers, creeks and other bodies of fresh water. It also can be present in poorly maintained swimming pools and hot tubs. The Central Texas child, who is hospitalized, had been wading and playing in Lake Somerville. The lake is in Burleson, Lee and Washington counties.

Citing personal privacy and medical confidentiality concerns, DSHS officials declined to release additional information about the child.

The ameba thrives when temperatures are higher. Most cases occur in July and August. Infections, though extremely rare, usually occur when water levels are lower and when water is stagnant or still.

Infection is believed to happen when water containing the microorganism is forced into the nasal passages, usually when skiing or diving or jumping into the water. The ameba can then travel to the brain and spinal cord, causing meningitis and encephalitis.

DSHS recommends that people not swim or ski in, or dive or jump into, stagnant water and that they hold their noses or use nose clips when jumping into lakes, rivers, ponds or other bodies of fresh water. Nose clips should be used when skiing or jet skiing.

PAM, which is not spread person-to-person, is almost always fatal. The last reported case of PAM in Texas was in 2002. There were three cases in 2001. There have been 34 reported cases in Texas since 1972.

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