

# Your Dog Might Love This on a Hot Summer Day – But Watch Out for These Caveats

It can be great exercise and equally as much fun. But there are also risks associated with it. And while the benefits may outweigh the risks, please read this first before deciding. Otherwise you could invite unintended consequences.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Swimming is great exercise for dogs and a great way to cool off during long summer days, but many pet parents are concerned about the effects of the chemicals they put in their backyard pools
- Chlorinated water does carry certain risks, as do the disinfection byproducts that form when organic materials mix with chlorinated water
- An alternative to chlorine is to perform frequent maintenance shock treatments to kill algae
- As a general rule, if you can make your outdoor pool relatively nontoxic, the benefits of allowing your pet to exercise in the water far outweigh the risks
- There are a few simple steps you can take to insure your dog stays safe in your backyard pool, including supervising all swim sessions, and rinsing your dog thoroughly after each dip in the pool

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With summer in full swing here in the U.S., many hot dogs want nothing more than to cool off in the water. And what could be more tempting than your backyard pool if you happen to have one? In addition to bringing your dog's body temperature down, swimming is excellent exercise for dogs and their humans.

However, as more and more pet parents become aware of the risks associated with the chemicals they use around their homes and yards, many dog owners are wondering if it's safe for Buddy or Bella to splash around in their chlorinated pool.

Ideally, I'd prefer dogs swim in natural bodies of water such as the ocean or a freshwater lake, but I realize this isn't an option for every dog owner.

## Chlorine Uses

Chlorine has a variety of uses. It's used to disinfect water and is part of the sanitation process for sewage and industrial waste. During the production of paper and cloth, chlorine is used as a bleaching agent. It's also used in cleaning products, including household bleach, which is chlorine dissolved in water.

Chlorine is also used in the preparation of chlorides, chlorinated solvents, pesticides, polymers, synthetic rubbers, and refrigerants.

## **Dangers of Chlorine Exposure to Humans**

I'm not aware of any studies on the health effects of chlorine exposure on pets, however, the health effects on humans are well documented. The severity of signs and symptoms depends on the amount, route and duration of exposure.

Most chlorine exposures in people occur via inhalation. Low-level exposures to chlorine in air cause irritation of the eyes, skin and airways, or sore throat and cough.

And while chlorine has a distinct odor that serves as a warning of its presence, it also causes olfactory fatigue or adaptation (meaning once the smell is in your nose, you have less ability to notice it).

At higher levels of exposure by inhalation, symptoms can progress to chest tightness, wheezing, difficulty breathing, bronchospasm and pulmonary edema.

Ingestion of chlorine dissolved in water (e.g., sodium hypochlorite or household bleach) causes burns to the tissues of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. In the eyes and on the skin, low levels of chlorine cause irritation, and higher exposures can result in severe chemical burns or ulcerations.

Children may receive a larger dose than adults exposed to environments with the same levels of chlorine gas because they have greater lung surface area-to-body weight ratios and increased minute volumes-to-weight ratios.

In addition, kids may be exposed to higher levels than adults in the same location because they are shorter, and higher levels of chlorine gas are found at ground level. We can assume this also applies to pets.

Another problem with chlorine: scientists have discovered the chemical byproducts formed when organic materials mix with chlorinated water are far more toxic than anyone could have guessed.

Disinfection byproducts (DBPs) are over 1,000 times more toxic than chlorine itself, for example. In swimming pools, the organic materials that cross-react with chlorine to form DBPs include hair, skin, dried sweat, dirt and urine. Lotions can also cause harmful chemical reactions.

## **How to Lower Your Dog's Chlorine Exposure Risk**

Because swimming is such great exercise for dogs who enjoy the water, and since so many dogs don't get enough exercise these days, I think if you can make your outdoor pool as nontoxic as possible, the benefits of allowing your pet to have swim sessions far outweigh the risks.

Ideally, you can find a way to keep your pool clean from bacteria, algae, and other organisms without the use of chlorine. Bromine is a popular milder alternative to chlorine, though it's a close cousin to chlorine. However, bromine is more expensive than chlorine and less stable when exposed to sunlight.

Dr. Mercola suggests skipping the chlorine altogether and instead, doing a maintenance shock treatment every five or six days to kill the algae buildup. The shock treatment volatilizes in about 24 to 48 hours and gives you a several-day window in which you can safely use your pool.

He also suggests reducing the amount of organic material you bring into your pool, which in turn reduces the amount of disinfection byproducts, by showering before swimming, and teaching children not to urinate in the water.

For dogs, I recommend a good brushing and even a quick hose down to remove as much dander and hair as possible prior to them diving in.

## Tips for Keeping Your Dog Safe in Your Pool

- Obviously, you'll want to make sure your dog knows how to swim and also where and how to get out of the pool. Like kids and even adults, dogs can become tired or panicked and risk drowning.
- Discourage your dog from drinking pool water, as the chlorine can cause GI irritation, and there's also the potential for water intoxication. Pay particular attention to dogs who splash around with their mouths open or gulp water as they swim. Fortunately, GI symptoms from drinking chlorinated water are usually minor, but it's best not to tempt fate.
- Always supervise your dog while he's in the pool. He'll need reminders from you not to drink the water, and by keeping a close eye on him you'll know if his eyes are getting a little red, or he's coughing, or he's getting worn out.
- It's a good idea to keep swim sessions relatively short, since extended time in chlorinated water can cause eye and skin irritation in sensitive dogs. And if there's a high level of chlorine in the pool, it can also irritate your pet's airways.
- After each swim session, rinse (or shampoo and rinse) your dog thoroughly to remove chlorine residue from her coat and skin. If she has long ears or is prone to ear infections, make sure to carefully towel dry her ears.
- Be sure to store your chlorine supply in its original container in a location your dog can't access.
- If your dog swims very regularly, like mine do, I recommend a periodic detox protocol. I use NAC (n-acetyl cysteine) and milk thistle for one week each month during the summer to assist in my dogs' systemic detoxification mechanisms.

## Sources and References

[PetMD](#)

[New York State Department of Health](#)

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