

- Virus

SWIMMING POOLS: IS THERE A RISK OF COVID TRANSMISSION?

DOCTORS SAY FACILITIES ARE SAFE, PROVIDED SAFETY PROTOCOLS ARE FOLLOWED

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Health experts say its unlikely as pools are regularly disinfected and the virus is not water-borne. Keeping a distance from other swimmers and avoiding common areas such as showers and locker rooms should keep you safe from infection |



Swimming pools are safe from Covid-19 transmission, provided people follow the guidelines laid out by health authorities in their respective emirates, according to health care experts. Allaying public fears of using sanitised pools amid the pandemic, Dr Payal Modi, specialist medical microbiologist and chairperson of infection control at the NMC Royal hospital, Dubai said: “Pools are regularly sanitised and disinfected as per municipality guidelines for not just Covid-19 but other microbes and bacteria that are waterborne and can be transmitted to those swimming. In the UAE, as per the municipality guidelines, all pools are checked for their PH levels and disinfected with chlorine, which is a strong disinfectant that can destroy or inactivate the SARS COV 2 virus within 30 seconds. People are instructed not to spit or cough in pools, but in case this happens, all bacteria and viruses are destroyed as soon as it touches the water surface, which contains 1-2 parts per million (PPM) chlorine as per the municipal guidelines. Chlorine is what we use to disinfect Covid-19 wards in hospitals too. Therefore, there is no danger of transmission of Covid-19 through swimming pools.”

No known incidence of water body transmission

Dr Mohammad Rafique, medical director of Prime Healthcare and specialist pulmonologist, said, “So far, as per the Centre for Disease Control, there have been no known cases of transmission of Covid-19 through water bodies. In fact, at pools, where people need to be careful is in locker rooms, showers and use of any common articles such as nose clips, shower caps, snorkels etc. The common use of these items has to be avoided. In pools, the designated distance of one to three metres has to be maintained. The municipal authorities, in new guidelines post Covid-19, allow only one person per four square meters in water.

Maintaining adequate distance in pools can ensure there is no airborne transmission of the virus.”

Municipality protocols

Dubai Municipality has issued strict post Covid-19 guidelines for all public pools that have reopened. The guidelines include regular disinfection of pools, use of masks and all Covid-19 hygiene protocols by lifeguards and other staff. The pools have to follow a regular cleaning and sanitisation regime in common areas such as locker rooms and showers after every use. There is a regular hygiene protocol to be followed for all closed areas with indoor ventilation near pool areas. Municipality rules ask for sanitisation every hour of articles that may be touched too often such as handrails, benches and installation of contactless sanitisation dispensers in these spaces.

Dubai Municipality has also prohibited pool bars and use of common pool articles such as goggles, shower caps, snorkels and towels. Patrons using pools must bring their own personal use articles.