



**MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY  
OFFICE OF DRINKING WATER AND MUNICIPAL ASSISTANCE**

**PEOPLE WITH AN OSTOMY USING PUBLIC SWIMMING POOLS FREQUENTLY ASKED  
QUESTIONS**

This document is intended to answer some frequently asked questions that have been directed to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) concerning people with an ostomy who wish to use a public swimming pool. This document answers questions that owners or operators of public swimming pools may have when a person with an ostomy desires to use their pool.

What is an ostomy and why is it needed?

**An ostomy is a surgically created opening through the abdomen to eliminate waste products, either urine or stool, into a pouch that is worn outside of the body. This opening is called an ostomy or stoma. Many people of all ages and for various reasons must have portions of their urinary or digestive system surgically removed. According to the United Ostomy Association of America (UOAA), there are over 700,000 people in the United States with an ostomy.**

What are the different types of ostomies?

**There are three main types of ostomies:**

- **Urostomy for the urinary system**
- **Ileostomy for the lower small intestine**
- **Colostomy for the colon or large intestine.**

**All of these ostomy types function for a person to be able to eliminate urinary or stool waste from their body.**

What does a person with an ostomy need to do to contain their bodily waste?

**They are fitted with a medical device called an ostomy pouching system to contain bodily waste. The pouch is emptied into the toilet for disposal. The person is trained immediately after surgery and becomes experienced in managing their ostomy pouch. They are motivated to maintain a good pouch seal, which allows them to prevent accidental leakage and return to activities of daily living they enjoy.**

Can people with an ostomy go swimming?

**Yes. According to the Wound Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society (WOCN Society) and the American College of Surgeons, a person with an ostomy should be able to resume full activity after surgery. Activities include sports, swimming, dancing, and other forms of exercise. Many people enjoy swimming and going in hot tubs, and having an ostomy is no reason to stop.**

What measures does a person with an ostomy take to maintain a good seal on their pouch before swimming in a pool?

**As most swimmers shower before they go in the pool, people with an ostomy apply a clean pouch. It is recommended that the new pouch be applied 12 hours before swimming or hot tub use which allows for good adhesion before getting it wet. People with ostomies use a variety of supportive accessories to enhance the security of their pouch to prevent any leakage.**

What are the chances of a pouch leaking?

**As pouching systems are designed to withstand exposure to liquids, leakage is unlikely. Pool contamination from people with an ostomy is less likely than contamination caused by adults or children who are unable to hold their urine or stool. In terms of contamination prevention, a swim diaper is vastly inferior to any pouching product for an ostomy.**

What happens if an ostomy pouch leaks?

**If a pouch leaks, then the pool will need to be treated according to the pool contingency plan. The DEQ *Suggested Practice for Pool Contamination* is available on our [DEQ Pools website](http://www.michigan.gov/deqpools) ([www.michigan.gov/deqpools](http://www.michigan.gov/deqpools)). For leakage from well individuals, this would be a limited contamination. Close the pool and treat the pool by raising the free available chlorine residual to 2 mg/L for 40 minutes before reopening the pool. If the contamination is from diarrhea, then close the pool and raise the free chlorine residual to 20 mg/L for at least 12 hours.**

What is the bottom line?

**No owner or operator of a public swimming pool in Michigan should prohibit a person with an ostomy from using their pool. The DEQ considers the contamination risk from people with an ostomy who use a proper pouching device to be insignificant compared to the potential contamination by children, potty trained or otherwise.**

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References:

1. "Teen Chat" You and Your Ostomy, WOCN Society January 2013
2. Stomas, Ostomies, and Appliances: Implications for Aquatic Therapy, Aquatic Therapy Journal, September 2006
3. American College of Surgeons: Division of Education Website

NOTE: The information in this document is intended to supplement the public swimming pool portions of the Public Health Code, 1978 PA 368, as amended, and the Public Swimming Pool Rules. These comments do not replace or supersede any portion of the Act and Rules. To download a copy of the Public Swimming Pool Act and Rules, please go to [www.michigan.gov/deqpools](http://www.michigan.gov/deqpools)