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Contact: Judi Pierce
Public Information Officer
254-761-3174
judi.pierce@brazos.org

RARE WATERBORNE THREAT REQUIRES CAUTION IN BRAZOS BASIN

WACO, Texas (June 6, 2025) – The first day of summer is only a few short days away, bringing with it higher temperatures and warmer water. To keep cool, many people will spend time on a lake, in a river, or at a water park. However, before heading out, everyone should be aware of the potential exposure to a rare threat that exists in all surface water and how to avoid it.

Primary amebic meningoencephalitis, or PAM, is caused by a rare amoeba, *Naegleria fowleri*, that lives in surface water and sediment. It's only a threat if water containing the amoeba is forced up the nasal passage. Although this may seem like an unlikely threat, who hasn't had water forced up their nose when playing, skiing, or diving into water? This cause has earned the nickname the "brain-eating amoeba."

Although the amoeba is not a common threat, taking a few easy precautions can help ensure a safe and healthy summer.

Here's why summer's a time for caution: warmer weather brings ideal conditions for *Naegleria fowleri*. These amoebae thrive in freshwater exceeding 80 degrees, which is precisely what happens to the very lakes and rivers we crave to cool off during Texas summers.

Naegleria fowleri is too small to be seen with the naked eye, but the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that it's a frequent resident in freshwater environments. So, for safety's sake, assume it's there. The infection can't spread from person to person or by drinking contaminated water.

The only way to completely prevent contracting PAM is to avoid participating in water-related activities that could force water up the nasal passage, including swimming in lakes, the Brazos River, or streams.

But if you do decide to participate, use nose clips or hold your nose shut while jumping into the water or always keep your head above water.

The amoeba is also found in soil, so avoid stirring up underwater sediment.

If you or a family member have experienced surface water being forced up your nasal passage and begin to experience symptoms, you must seek immediate medical attention. Symptoms mimic those typically experienced with the flu, such as headache, fever, nausea, or vomiting, according to the CDC. Be sure to inform your physician that you've been exposed to surface water and request testing for PAM. Symptoms can begin anywhere from one to 12 days after infection. Later symptoms can include a stiff neck, confusion, seizures, hallucinations, and coma.

Two to three PAM infections are reported each year in the United States, and there have been only four reported survivors in the U.S., according to the CDC.

Don't let safety concerns put a damper on creating lasting memories with your loved ones. Take precautions and return home safe and healthy.

For more information about PAM, contact your local county health department or the Texas Department of State Health Services at 512-776-7111 or 1-888-963-7111. For more on PAM prevention, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/naegleria/prevention/swimming.html>

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About the Brazos River Authority

The Brazos River Authority, with headquarters in Waco, is the oldest river authority in Texas. Created by the Texas Legislature in 1929, the Authority's 42,000 square-mile territory includes all or part of 70 counties; extending from the Texas-New Mexico border west of Lubbock to the Gulf of Mexico near Freeport.

The BRA built, owns, and operates three reservoirs (Lakes Possum Kingdom, Granbury, and Limestone). In addition to these water supply reservoirs, the BRA contracts with the Corps of Engineers for the water supply storage space at eight federal multi-purpose flood control and water conservation reservoirs (Lakes Whitney, Belton, Proctor, Somerville, Stillhouse Hollow, Granger, Georgetown and Aquilla).

The Brazos River Authority operates a regional wastewater system for the cities of Temple-Belton. The BRA also operates wastewater treatment plants for the cities of Clute-Richwood, Sugar Land, and Hutto. The BRA owns and operates a potable water treatment system, the East Williamson County Regional Water System, for the City of Taylor.

The BRA engages in water quality monitoring activities throughout the Brazos River basin. As a member of the Texas Clean River Program, the BRA samples and tests water from more than 100 locations throughout the basin on either a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. For further information on the Brazos River Authority, please contact Judi Pierce, Public Information Officer at 254-761-3103.