

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BRA encourages safety: Higher temperatures mean higher risks for deadly water amoeba

WACO, Texas – June 2, 2022 – It's that time of year when a deadly, but uncommon, water amoeba thrives, which means it's time to take extra precautions over the summer while enjoying our Texas waterways.

Commonly referred to as the "brain-eating amoeba," *Naegleria fowleri* is an amoeba that thrives in freshwater warmer than 80 degrees; a cruel combination for those of us who also enjoy going for a swim when the temperature gets high.

Primary amebic meningoencephalitis, or PAM, is a rare brain infection caused when water containing the amoeba is forced into the nasal passages, usually when jumping into the water or water skiing. PAM only infects people when water containing the amoeba enters through the nose. This means the infection cannot be spread from person to person or by drinking contaminated water.

The only way to completely prevent contracting PAM is not participating in water-related activities, such as swimming in a lake, river, or stream.

However, if you do decide to participate, use nose clips, or hold your nose shut while jumping into the water. With the amoeba also often found in soil, it is best to avoid stirring up underwater sediment.

Symptoms typically start showing within five days of exposure, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. They include headache, fever, nausea, or vomiting. As the disease develops, symptoms can advance to loss of balance, stiff neck, seizures, and hallucinations. The disease progresses quickly and usually causes death within two weeks of the initial infection. It is essential to know the risks as symptoms can often be mistaken for the flu or bacterial meningitis.

The disease is rare, though there have been Texas cases reported within the Brazos River basin.

The fatality rate is more than 97%, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. Only 4 people out of 143 known infected individuals from 1962 to 2016 in the United States have survived, according to the state health services.

Recreational water users should assume that *Naegleria fowleri* is present in warm freshwater across the United States, according to the state health services. That includes the Brazos River and water supply reservoirs we love.

Texans should seek immediate medical care whenever they develop a sudden onset of fever, headache, stiff neck, and vomiting, particularly if they have been in warm freshwater recently, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. You must inform your health care provider of the exposure to surface water in this manner. Specific testing is required to quickly identify the PAM virus, and prompt treatment can save lives.

By being aware and educating others, we can all stay safe this summer in the Brazos River basin.

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

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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.