

For Immediate Release

Contact: Charlie Smith
Asst. Public Information Officer
254-761-3174

BRA encourages safety vigilance as rising Texas temperatures means increased risk for deadly water amoeba

WACO, Texas – June 11, 2021 – Summer has arrived with its higher temperatures and water conditions suitable for the spread of an uncommon but usually fatal illness that can occur when water goes up your nose, after, for instance, swimming, diving, skiing, or other water recreation.

Primary amebic meningoencephalitis, or PAM, is a rare brain infection caused when swimmers come in contact with *Naegleria fowleri*, an amoeba found in freshwater and soil. Commonly referred to as the "brain-eating amoeba," the amoeba thrives in freshwater warmer than 80 degrees, and stagnant or slow-moving.

PAM only infects people when water containing the amoeba enters through the nose. The amoeba travels up the nose, making its way into the brain along the olfactory nerve, destroying brain tissue.

The infection cannot be spread from person to person or by drinking contaminated water.

Those infected with PAM usually start showing symptoms within five days of exposure, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. Symptoms can often be mistaken for the flu or bacterial meningitis, as 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.

While the disease is rare, there have been cases reported in Texas within the Brazos River basin. The fatality rate is more than 97%, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only 4 people in the U.S. out of 145 cases identified have survived the infection from 1962 to 2018.

The Texas Department of State Health Services reports that most PAM infections occur when temperatures are hot and water levels are lower.

Prevention is easy.

The only way to completely prevent contracting PAM is to not participate in surface water-related activities such as swimming in a lake, river or stream. If you do decide to participate, use nose clips or hold your nose shut while jumping into the water. With the amoeba often found in soil, it's best to avoid stirring up underwater sediment.

Texas Health and Human Services also recommend avoiding water activities in bodies of warm freshwater with low water levels. Avoid stagnant or polluted water and take "No Swimming" signs seriously. Swimming pools and hot tubs that are properly cleaned, maintained and chlorinated are generally safe, as is saltwater.

If water does get up your nose while swimming in warm freshwater, monitor for flu-like symptoms. If you do start showing symptoms, going to a medical professional and informing them that you may have been exposed to the amoeba could save your life. There are specific tests that must be conducted to identify the PAM disease before treatment may begin. If medical professionals are not aware of the potential exposure to the amoeba, valuable time may be lost before a proper diagnosis is made, and life-saving treatment may begin.

The Brazos River Authority 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. However, the BRA does not test for the *Naegleria fowleri* amoeba because it is common in all surface water throughout the world. Those who live in warmer-weather states - such as Texas - should assume there is a risk when entering all warm freshwater bodies.

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 and the Brushy Creek Regional Wastewater System for the City of Round Rock. The BRA also operates wastewater treatment plants for the cities of Clute-Richwood, Sugar Land, and Hutto. The BRA owns and operates 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.