

Safety Tip of the Month – September 2006
VSI Safety Committee

“How about that Lake Swimming?”

Test your knowledge on lake swimming. Answer true or false, and then check your responses by reading over the following answers.

1. Lakes, unlike the oceans, have no underwater currents or eddies. (True / False)
2. If you cannot see the lake bottom, then it is okay to dive into that particular area. (True / False)
3. If you are certain that the water depth at the end of the lake pier is 15 feet, then it is safe to jump in the muddy water feet first. (True / False)
4. Lake water in the summer is generally just as warm (78 – 82 degrees) as indoor swimming pools. (True / False)
5. As long as a lifeguard is on duty, swimming alone in a 30 acre lake is safe. (True / False)
6. When hearing thunder and / or seeing lightning all swimmers should immediately exit the lake. (True / False)
7. A swimmer has an open cut on her leg. Since the lake water is derived from natural springs, there is no risk of infection by exposure of this leg to the lake water. (True / False)
8. Swimmers competing in a one mile lake race on a very hot day are much less likely to become dehydrated than swimmers competing for the same race distance in an indoor facility. (True / False)
9. When swimming in a lake, unlike the exposures of ocean swimming, there is very little risk of contact with potentially harmful animals. (True / False)

Answers.... How well did you do??

1. **False.** Lakes in limestone areas or in quarries may have underwater springs, which can create strong turbulence. There may also be underwater currents / eddies near the wall of a lake dam. As feeder streams pour into the lake, the temperature contrast between the two bodies of water and the turbulence may lead to dangerous undercurrents.
2. **False.** The lake bottom may be only 3 feet from the surface, such that diving in this area may result in a cervical fracture (broken neck) with resultant death or permanent paralysis from the chest down.
3. **False.** Turbid, cloudy water may mask large logs or brush that may be just a few feet below the surface. Even a feet first jump may result in leg injury AND could result in drowning if the swimmer's foot became stuck in the brush or floating tree roots, seven feet or more below the water surface.
4. **False.** The temperature of the water depends on the latitude of the lake (e.g., Maine vs. Texas), the average depth of the lake, and the number / volume of springs coming into the lake. Any lake swimmer should be cognizant of the actual temperature of the water before starting her / his swim. Be aware of the signs and symptoms of hypothermia.
5. **False.** A lifeguard may have difficulty seeing every swimmer who is on the other side of the lake. Even if a swimmer is starting to have distress, it would take the lifeguard a while to respond to the distressed swimmer.
6. **True.** A lake is not a place to be when there is an electric storm.
7. **False.** There is a small, but measurable, amount of bacteria in some bodies of untreated fresh water.
8. **False.** The exertion placed on swimmers, coupled with the larger insensitve losses of water due to extreme heat, sets up a significant risk for dehydration, even though the swimmer may be immersed in tepid or cool lake water.
9. **False.** Near the shore of the lake, there is some exposure (though limited) to ticks (falling out of overhanging trees), mosquitoes, snakes, turtles, and bees.