



Pool Water – Is It Okay?

Pool water can be OK to drink in an emergency. We say 'can' because there are a few considerations. Was the fill or source water from a municipal source that would have a water treatment plant? Drinking water is OK to drink. Well water, ground water or surface water, who knows? Pool water is filtered better than drinking water. Fill up a pool and you will see.

The taste threshold for TDS (total dissolved solids) is about 2500 ppm. At that level you can just barely taste the salt. Sea water by comparison has a TDS of 35,000 ppm. If the sanitizer level has been maintained and regular superchlorination has been done, then the water would be OK to drink. However, most people do not like the taste of it. Mostly because of TDS and some chloramines.

If you want to be sure, run the water through a charcoal or carbon filter. This will remove chlorine, cyanuric acid and almost all of the organic chemicals. These can be purchased at a sporting goods or hunting type store. You can also boil the water and that will kill everything and it will remove all of the volatile chemicals.

So on a temporary or emergency basis, you can drink pool water.

The bad news is that most pool water contains some level of trihalomethanes (THM) - usually in the parts per billion (ppb) range. These THMs are not allowed in drinking water because they are carcinogenic. One example is chloroform. There is no regulation on THMs in pool or spa water. Mostly because you are swimming in it and not drinking or ingesting it. Absorption is minimal.

To form a THM certain precursors must be present in the water and then chlorine must react with them to form THM. These precursors are some synthetic organic chemicals (SOCs) or some volatile organic chemicals (VOCs). If there are no SOC or VOC present then no THM is formed. There is no way to tell from pool to pool if the precursors or THMs are there. Testing is expensive and requires a gas chromatograph.

So a dog that uses the pool or spa for a water bowl may have a problem long term. And maybe not depending on precursors and THMs.

Extrapolating some numbers on cyanuric acid and its dangers - an adult person would have to consume about 4 pounds of pure CYA to have a problem (actually only 50% would have a problem). Four pounds is about how much CYA is in a 15,000-gallon pool. So you would have to drink the whole pool to have a problem. By the way, CYA is not cancer causing and does not cause reproductive problems. Proof is available from OxyChem, Monsanto, Olin, etc.