

Be cautious of brain-eating amoeba



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

It is a wonder that more of us don't pay the full price, plus tax, taking part in our outdoor activities. There are more ways old Mother Nature can do you in than can possibly be imagined.

For example, in my later years I have become obsessed with Africa and hunting dangerous game. Everything in Africa bites, but going after the Big 5 or 7, depending on which way you look at it, throws a new level of danger that drives my life insurance company crazy.

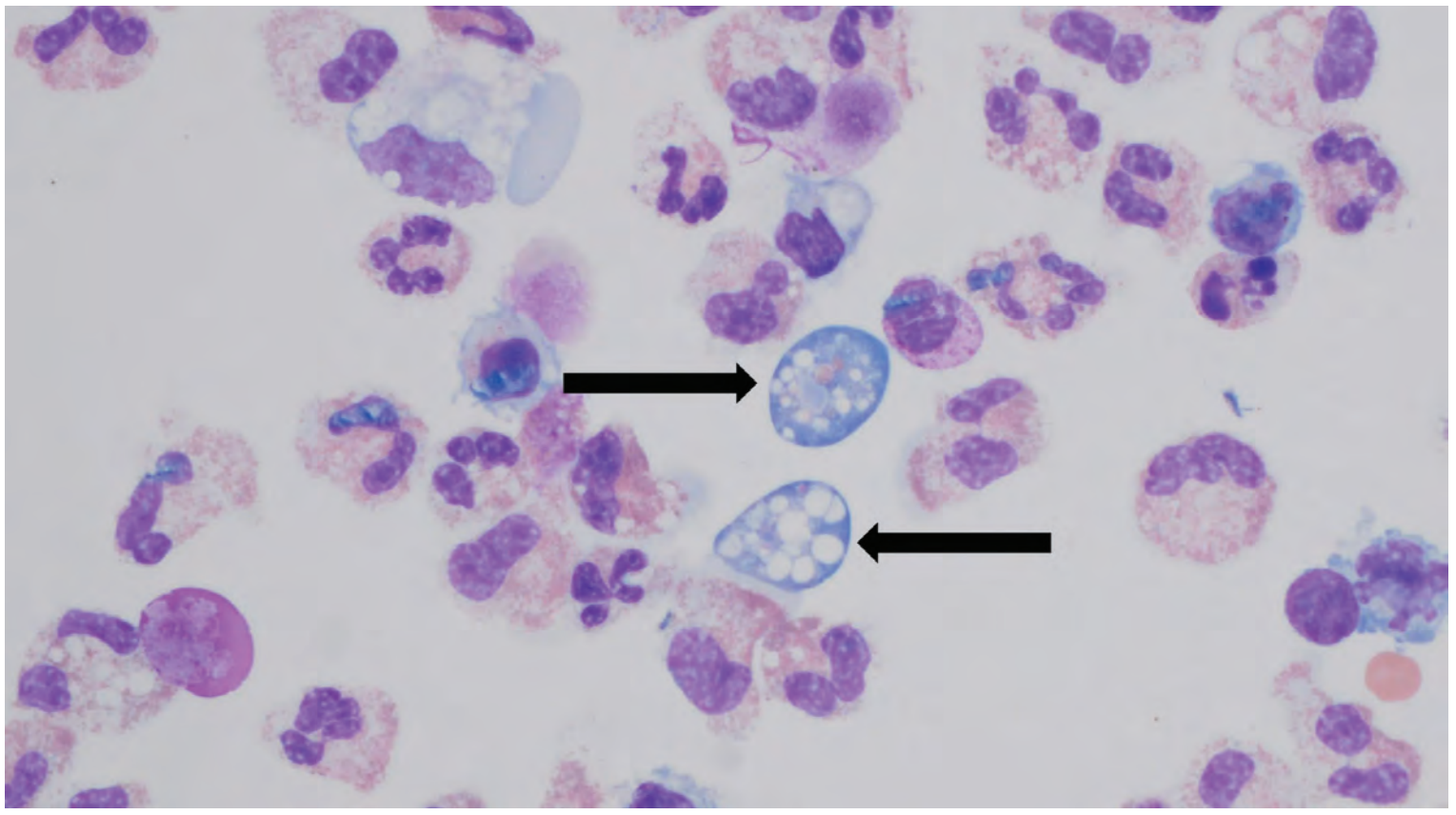
Then there are the dangers in the outdoors that we cannot see. I had a friend whose daughter was in the Peace Corps, stationed in the Amazon region.

My friend went to visit her there and contracted an unidentified virus that eventually settled in his lungs. My friend fought a noble fight against this virus for 6 months, finally cashing in his chips. They were never able to identify what the virus was or what caused it.

Another friend of mine went to Africa to hunt the Nile crocodile, which can reach 20 feet in length and weigh more than 1,600 pounds. The crocodile is responsible for thousands of deaths each year, but the croc is not what got him. Crocodile hunting requires a hunter to spend much time in the water, and the water in Africa is questionable at best.

My friend became ill shortly after returning home and was diagnosed as having caught a waterborne parasite. They never identified the parasite, and my friend lost the battle about a month after returning home.

Just because you limit your



High resolution of Naegleria fowleri amoeba in a person's cerebrospinal fluid. (Dr. James Roberts/Children's Healthcare of Atlanta)

recreational activities to the U.S.A., don't think you won't one day be a star in one of those, "This happened to my late friend" stories. Most of us will go through life as free as a paroled parakeet, but you never know. Take swimming for instance.

About 90 million Americans over the age of 16 swim in oceans, lakes, and streams each year. That equates to roughly a third of the population.

Aside from the usual risks, drowning, diving in shallow water, and swimming after eating (an old myth that is not true by the way), there is a risk of getting an infection caused by a brain-eating amoeba.

During the summer of 2022, a child died from a rare infection caused by a brain-eating amoeba after swimming in a river near Omaha, Nebraska. Doctors believe the child died of primary amebic meningoencephalitis (PAM), an infection caused by the Naegleria fowleri amoeba. Try saying all those names at once.

The child came into contact with the amoeba while swimming in the Elkhorn River, just west of Omaha. People are usually infected when the water containing the amoeba enters

the body through the nose while swimming or diving into lakes and rivers.

Another source includes tainted tap water in the Houston area in 2020. Another person, a month before the child in Omaha, died of the same infection after a swim in Lake of Three Fires in Iowa.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the Naegleria fowleri infections are rare, about three or four cases annually in the U.S., but they are overwhelming fatal. There are no antibiotics or antivirals that get rid of the amoeba. There were 154 reported cases between 1962 and 2021 in the U.S., with only four survivors. The numbers are climbing, as 71 of those cases were between 2000 and 2021.

The symptoms for PAM come on suddenly and are severe right from the start. Possible symptoms include high fever, severe headache, nausea and vomiting, trembling, confusion, and coma.

The leader of the pack for these infections is Texas and Florida because they have warmer waters. The amoeba is typically found in southern states because it prefers waters warmer than 86 degrees (Fahrenheit).

But don't get too comfortable. Naegleria fowleri is usually found in warm freshwater lakes, rivers, and hot springs. It can also be found in water discharge from industrial or power plants, geothermal well water, poorly maintained swimming pools and hot water heaters.

Last summer, Lake Mead officials warned hikers heading to the popular hot springs below Hoover Dam to avoid any water activity that involved splashing or submerging your head, after a 2-year-old succumbed to the illness after swimming in a hot spring near Alamo, Nevada. They have been migrating north in recent years, another thing that is being blamed on climate change. As northern regions warm, water levels drop from drought conditions, creating an environment that is ripe for this amoeba to develop.

Even here in Colorado, we can be exposed to this risk in the future. Another breeding ground can be an improperly cared for hot tub, or even hot springs found throughout the state.

As our climate warms, it is expected the amoeba will continue a slow push northward. If you decide to swim this summer, the CDC suggests limiting the

amount of water going up the nose. It is best to avoid bodies of warm freshwater. Avoid water temperatures that are above 75 degrees for extended periods of time. It is important to use nose plugs, keep your head above the surface and properly clean and chlorinate wading pools, swimming pools and spas.

It is a very slim chance you may contract this rare infection, especially here in Colorado. All the water I find around here seems like it just melted the day before I arrived. Still, rare does not mean never. I am minus two close friends from rare infections that hadn't even been identified.

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Tips for your July garden



Gardening From A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

July can be a fun and busy time in the garden. It seems like everywhere you look something is going on.

Most people agree that this year has been one of the greenest that they can remember in quite some time. The rain was wonderful! But it also caused weeds to flourish.

So it's time to get out there and tackle them. However, spraying weeds when it's hot is not a good idea. Spraying herbicides when temperatures are above 80 degrees can cause the herbicide to drift and kill nearby plants. Read the label of the product that you are using to check the recommendations.

I recently heard some-

one say they put food coloring in their weed spray so they can tell what weeds have already been sprayed. That may sound like a great idea but I think most food coloring will stain and you can't wash it off of your clothes.

And I would think it would take a lot of food color to accomplish the job. They were unaware that you can buy dye, or marker, at several garden centers throughout town. It's usually a blue color and will wash off rather quickly, depending on the brand. I wear rubber

spray gloves when I use it and try not to get it on my clothes or structures.

Once again earwigs are wreaking havoc on local gardens. Most of us detest them, but they can be considered beneficial insects because they eat small insects such as aphids and thrips. However, when their populations become large they can become destructive as well as annoying.

They often chew on flowers, causing some pretty severe damage to the blooms. They will also leave tender new vegetable starts looking like

a naked stalk. Earwigs often show up around homes in such massive numbers that it can become a bit overwhelming, even if they mean you no harm.

If you find yourself overrun with these little critters you could make a trap by adding about half-inch of vegetable oil and about a teaspoon of soy sauce in a small butter tub.

Cut a dime-size hole in the lid then bury the butter tub to the rim. This will allow the earwigs to crawl in but not out.

Check the trap in the

morning to see what you may have caught and repeat this process until you've gained control. Baits are also available through local nurseries if you prefer a simpler means of control. Cockroach traps or sprays are also effective against earwigs. Deep wood chip mulch provides a happy environment for these guys to hide in, so removing some of the mulch may help.

The insecticide Sevin could also be used if you're so inclined.

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