

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 75 (2009)
Heft: [8]

Artikel: Urine-filled pools to be cleaned up
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-944519>

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Study finds tattoo ink to be substandard

Tattoos could present greater health risks than previously believed after a federal study found gross deficiencies in ink standards and ingredients.

The Federal Health Office said researchers studied 152 ink samples from 16 cantons used for tattoos. They found four out of five samples did not meet statutory codes and forty per cent of the samples tested had bans against their use.

Some unapproved substances in the ink could lead to cancer, the office said. Ten samples studied contained carcinogenic nitrogen compounds while 35 more used unapproved dyes. Twenty-

two samples had potential allergens.

Hygiene was also a problem, the study found. A microbiological survey revealed 35 sealed or newly opened samples had traces of germs that could lead to infection. Ink containers were often not labeled properly either.

The government has demanded ink manufacturers and handlers bring their products up to health code standards. Officials said they would perform another round of tests using new samples at a later, unspecified date to see if the demands had been met.

from swissinfo

Urine-filled pools to be cleaned up

Up to half of Swiss public pools contain excessive amounts of urine, faeces, sweat and germs. The good news however is that while water quality often leaves something to be desired, the health of swimmers is not at risk - and the government now wants to clean things up by introducing a limit of 3mg of urea (the main nitrogen-containing substance in urine) per liter of water.

Last year canton Zurich said 27 per cent of its pools did not pass muster, and during 2003's "summer of the century" the figure jumped to 50 per cent.

In canton Graubünden, fault was found with 43 per cent of pool water samples.

Often the level of chlorine was too high, too. The government now intends to standardise quality control. The cantonal chemists have been calling for harmonised pool controls for a long time and welcomed the government's decision.

The government also intends to incorporate pool water into the federal food law, which came into force 100 years ago.

The revised law doesn't mean pool water should be fit to drink but rather that the importance given to the subject by the government would put pressure on pool owners to clean up their act and ensure standards are met.

More fresh water should be pumped into pools - 30 litres per swimmer per day - but because this lowers the pool temperature and means more chemicals must be added, many pools don't do this. Parents should show more discipline with their young children - making them go to the loo before they jump in the water.

Improving the lavatories in public pools could also help, but urea itself is not a problem.

Urea is a harmless substance, but when it reacts with chlorine it can produce trichloramine substances. A high level of trichloramine hanging in the air at indoor pools can cause eye and respiratory irritation because it is a strong irritant to mucous membranes. For this reason ventilation is very important for chlorinated pools.

from swissinfo

Exercise key to preventing second heart attack



Exercise helps people recover after a heart attack but the benefits vanish when the workouts stop, Swiss researchers have found.

Doctors looked at 209 people who had survived a heart attack to gauge the effects of different types of exercise and what happened when people stopped regular physical activity.

The team from the Clinique Valmont-Genolier in Montreux said the blood vessel function improved after four weeks of exercise among people who exercised but that long-term physical activity was key to preventing another heart attack.

As part of the study, volunteers were assigned to receive training in aerobic exercise, resistance workouts to build strength, a combination of both or to do no exercise at all.

After four weeks, blood vessel function in the three exercise groups improved regardless of the type of exercise, the researchers said. There were no improvements among the men and women who did not work out.

The researchers also asked some people in the exercise groups to stop physical activity. They found that after one month all the positive benefits of working out had vanished.

Heart disease - the world's leading cause of death - is caused by fatty deposits that harden and block arteries, high blood pressure which damages blood vessels, and other factors.

Doctors know that exercise improves heart function but how much and what type of exercise people should take after a heart attack is unclear, the researchers said.

from swissinfo