

# Brain-Eating Amoeba Found in Louisiana Water Supply

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Brain-eating amoeba

**The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals announced that the *Naegleria fowleri* amoeba was found in the water system of St. John the Baptist Parish.**

([NewsWire.net](http://NewsWire.net) -- August 30, 2014) -- Residents of Garyville and Mt. Airy have been advised to take precautions. This is the same brain-eating amoeba found in both St. Bernard and De Soto Parish, last year and blamed for two deaths.

The so-called brain-eating amoeba is a species discovered in 1965. Its formal name is *Naegleria fowleri*. Although first identified in Australia, this amoeba is believed to have evolved in the U.S.

There are several species of *Naegleria* but only the *fowleri* species causes human disease. There are several *fowleri* subtypes, all are believed equally dangerous.

*N. fowleri* is microscopic: 8 micrometers to 15 micrometers in size, depending on its life stage and environment. By comparison, a hair is 40 to 50 micrometers wide.

The term "brain-eating amoeba" makes the amoeba sound like a tiny zombie stalking your skull. But brains are accidental food for them. According to the CDC, *N. fowleri* normally eats bacteria. But when the amoeba gets into human body, it uses the brain as a food source.

Studies suggest that *N. fowleri* amoebas are attracted to the chemicals that nerve cells use for communication. Once in the nose, the amoebas travel through the olfactory nerve (the nerve connected with sense of smell) into the frontal lobe of the brain.

The nose is the pathway of the amoeba, so infection occurs most often from diving, water skiing, or performing water sports in which water is forced into the nose. But infections have occurred in people who dunked their heads in hot springs or who cleaned their nostrils with neti pots filled with untreated tap water.

A person infected with *N. fowleri* cannot spread the infection to another person.

While the amoeba is extremely rare, the pathogen was responsible for at least three deaths in Louisiana parishes since 2011. Last year a 4-year-old boy from St. Bernard Parish died after contracting the infection from using a slip-in-slide. This summer a 9-year-old girl from Kansas died after being infected with the amoeba.

"Families can take simple steps to protect themselves from exposure to this amoeba. The most important thing is to avoid allowing water to go up your nose while bathing or swimming in a pool, " said Louisiana State Health Officer Jimmy Guidry. "It is important to remember that the water is safe to drink; the amoeba cannot infect an individual through the stomach."

According to officials, "the parish's system is currently in compliance with all state and federal drinking water regulations, including the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospital's emergency rule for *Naegleria fowleri*."

A chlorine burn through the water system began in Thursday, followed by a sixty day wait to see if the amoeba has flushed out.

According to the CDC, in the US between 1963 and 2013 just three people out of 132 managed to survive the infection. The disease is almost always fatal.

Source: <http://newsWire.net/newsroom/news/00084782-brain-eating-amoeba-found-in-louisiana-water-supply.html>