

Myth vs. Fact: DHH Dispels Rumors about Naegleria Fowleri Ameba, Drinking Water in Louisiana

MYTH: The water from Ebarb Water District 1 Aimwell Area is not safe to drink.

FACT: This is false. The water supply from Ebarb Water District 1 Aimwell Area remains safe to drink. The *Naegleria fowleri* ameba does not cause an infection if it is in water that a person drinks because the ameba is killed by normal levels of stomach acid. However, the ameba can cause an infection if it goes into a person's nose. Residents from Ebarb Water District 1 Aimwell Area should take precautions to avoid getting water in their noses.

MYTH: Water systems all across the state are affected by *Naegleria fowleri*, making the water unsafe.

FACT: This is false. The only systems where testing has confirmed the presence of the ameba are St. Bernard Parish Water System, DeSoto Parish Waterworks District 1, St. John Parish Water District 1 and Ebarb Water District 1 Aimwell Area. The *Naegleria fowleri* ameba is a naturally occurring parasite that is found in freshwater and could grow in a water system if the water is untreated. Proper chlorination and the use of disinfectants by water systems are known to kill the ameba. Ebarb District 1 Aimwell Area officials will soon begin a chlorine burn aimed at eliminating the ameba from the water system. The chlorine burn will take at least 60 days to complete once they begin.

MYTH: If I am an Ebarb Water District 1 Aimwell Area customer, I should completely avoid using the tap water.

FACT: It is safe to use the tap water from Ebarb Water District 1 Aimwell Area, as long as you are taking proper precautions and avoid getting the water in your nose. According to the CDC, personal actions to reduce the risk of *Naegleria fowleri* infection should focus on limiting the amount of

water going up a person's nose and lowering the chances that *Naegleria fowleri* may be in the water. For information on preventative measures, please visit the CDC Website here: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/naegleria/prevention.html>. Safety tips can also be found at dhh.louisiana.gov/WaterFacts.

MYTH: The only way to be sure that the water is safe for all uses is to test it for *Naegleria fowleri*.

FACT: This is untrue. The best way to ensure that the water is safe is for it to be tested and monitored for residual chlorine levels. Currently, the state is under an emergency order that requires public drinking water systems to maintain a free chlorine or chloramine residual of 0.5 mg/L or higher. This will control *Naegleria fowleri*, provided the disinfectant residual persists throughout the water supply system at all times.

MYTH: The *Naegleria fowleri* ameba is a new problem that was only recently brought into the United States.

FACT: False. *Naegleria fowleri* is an ameba that occurs naturally in freshwater. Testing for this ameba is relatively new and still evolving, but it has been present in freshwater bodies of water for many years. A handful of deaths in the United States have been traced back to the ameba. In general, *Naegleria fowleri* infections are very rare. In the 10 years from 2003 to 2012, 31 infections were reported in the U.S. Of those cases, 28 people were infected by contaminated recreational water, and 3 people were infected after performing nasal irrigation using contaminated tap water.