

Swimming pools

Once again, the CSIC cites the USA's Center for Disease Control's findings that there is 'no evidence that the virus causing Covid-19 can be transmitted to persons via water in swimming pools, jacuzzis, spas, or purpose-built leisure and play areas involving water', which would include, for example, water parks.



To guarantee this, though, the CSIC insists it is crucial to ensure chlorine levels are maintained according to those set by law.

These, says the CSIC, stipulate a 'free-circulating chlorine-water ratio of 1-3mg per litre', which 'would be sufficient to deactivate the virus and, therefore, sufficient to prevent contamination risks whilst bathing'.

Maintaining these levels, however, means constant monitoring 'at all times during pool use' to 'guarantee the necessary anti-microbial capacity'.

Pools with on-site maintenance staff, such as public facilities, may 'feasibly' be monitored to this extent, says the CSIC, but otherwise, 'the essential measures need to be taken' to ensure 'permanent and constant disinfection'.

And the problem in this scenario is that chlorine levels do not remain constant throughout the day, reveals Salvador Mauri, managing director of SCP Pool España – part of PoolCorp, the world's largest distributor of swimming pool equipment and products – since chlorine becomes diluted as it acts on the water.

Factors such as water temperature and 'organic material from bathers' – unavoidable substances, such as sweat and dead skin particles – gradually deactivate the chlorine and leave 'chloramines' in the water, Mauri explains.

Chloramines are derivatives of ammonia and organic amines, chemical compounds containing these along with chlorine, often used to clean drinking water – but in the quantity they appear in swimming pool water after chlorine comes into contact with high temperatures and with dirt from bathers, they cause irritation to eyes, skin, and mucous membranes.



Mauri says two methods of chlorinating public, private and communal pools are normally used – one is an automatic dosing with sodium hypochlorite, which is basically bleach; the other is by using ordinary salt dissolved in water which is converted into chlorine using salt electrolysis systems, which is generally considered to be healthier, easier and cheaper, and is becoming increasingly popular in Spain.

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In either case, they diminish rapidly.

“You could have, at 09.00 in the morning, 3mg chlorine per litre of water, but if it's a really hot day and you have lots of bathers, by 11.00, it's all evaporated and there's none left. The more bathers and the higher the temperature, the faster the chlorine acts, and as it does so, it reduces.

“For this reason, you need to check the water an absolute minimum of four times a day – when opening, closing, and twice in between.

“The problem is that chlorine levels are measured using optical systems, which are very simple, but do not give you an exact measure,” Mauri reveals.

“To maintain a pure level of chlorine in the water, governments and experts recommend using automatic control systems – a type of 'robot' which analyses the water constantly and, if it detects a fall in 'available' chlorine, it activates immediately to add more. Once the level of disinfection is sufficient, it stops, so it never adds more chlorine than is safe.

“These systems have been available for over 20 years, but largely due to not knowing they exist, they are not found in all communal and public pools.”

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