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TEXAS LAKE AND RIVER SWIMMERS REMINDED OF POTENTIAL HEALTH RISKS

WACO, Texas (June 10, 2015) – With summer heating up and an abundance of water in the Brazos River basin, it seems everyone is anxious to head out to nearby rivers and lakes. However, the conditions that make the water temperature so tempting can also encourage the growth of a rare but dangerous microorganism.

The Brazos River Authority encourages recreationists to enjoy the water, while being aware of health risks associated with swimming in or around stagnant or slow-moving water.

Primary amebic meningoencephalitis (PAM) is a rare disease caused by *Naegleria fowleri*, an amoeba found in almost all untreated, fresh surface water and in soil. The amoeba thrives in low levels of fresh water that is warmer than 80 degrees and stagnant or slow-moving. The PAM infection occurs when water containing the organism is forced into the nasal passages – usually from diving or jumping into water or from water skiing. The amoeba makes its way into the brain and spinal cord, destroying brain tissue.

Symptoms of the infection include severe headache, high fever, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, seizures and hallucinations as the condition worsens. Although PAM is rare, those infected usually succumb to the disease within a week.

There were 28 known cases of PAM in Texas between 1983 and 2013, according the Texas Department of State Health Services. The TDSHS confirmed one case of PAM in Texas in 2013. Most cases occurred in young males, ages 9 – 12, with a history of exposure to surface water during warm summer months.

To prevent infection, it is recommended that those taking part in warm, fresh water-related activities use nose clips or hold their noses shut while jumping into water. With the amoeba often found in soil, it is best to avoid stirring up underwater sediment. The Texas Department of Health recommends that people avoid stagnant or polluted water and take “No Swimming” signs seriously.

For many years, *Naegleria fowleri* infections were considered to be fatal with no specific treatments available. However, in recent years, there have been a few patients with confirmed cases of PAM that have survived. The Texas Department of State Health Services recommends that anyone experiencing symptoms of PAM should be evaluated immediately by a physician. The physician should be informed that the patient has taken part in activities in warm surface water so that appropriate testing may be quickly undertaken.

While the BRA tests for a variety of contaminants, such as *E.coli* at more than 100 sites, no testing is conducted for the PAM microbe. PAM cannot be spread person to person nor by drinking water. Swimming pools and hot tubs that are properly cleaned, maintained and chlorinated are generally safe, as is salt water.

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About the Brazos River Authority

The Brazos River Authority, with headquarters in Waco, is the oldest river authority in Texas. Created by the Texas Legislature in 1929, the Authority's 42,000 square-mile territory includes all or part of 70 counties; extending from the Texas-New Mexico border west of Lubbock to the Gulf of Mexico near Freeport.

The BRA built, owns, and operates three reservoirs (Lakes Possum Kingdom, Granbury, and Limestone). In addition to these water supply reservoirs, the BRA contracts with the Corps of Engineers for the water supply storage space at eight federal multi-purpose flood control and water conservation reservoirs (Lakes Whitney, Belton, Proctor, Somerville, Stillhouse Hollow, Granger, Georgetown and Aquilla).

The Brazos River Authority operates a regional wastewater system for the cities of Temple-Belton and the Brushy Creek Regional Wastewater System for the City of Round Rock. The BRA also operates wastewater treatment plants for the cities of Clute-Richwood, Sugar Land, and Hutto. The BRA owns and operates the East Williamson County Regional Water System for the City of Taylor.

The BRA engages in water quality monitoring activities throughout the Brazos River basin. As a member of the Texas Clean River Program, the BRA samples and tests water from more than 100 locations throughout the basin on either a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. For further information on the Brazos River Authority, please contact Judi Pierce, Public Information Officer at 254-761-3103.