

Swimming pool water inactivates Covid-19 virus in 30 seconds, according to new study

- The presence of chlorine in water, under the right conditions, can inactivate the virus that causes Covid-19 in just 30 seconds.
- Findings follow research by virologists at Imperial College London, led by Professor Wendy Barclay.
- Baby swimming business Water Babies worked collaboratively with Swim England and the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) to provide context and materials for the research.
- Reassuring news comes as indoor swimming pools reopen across the UK on Monday the 12th April.

DATE, London – Swimming pool water can inactivate the Covid-19 virus in just 30 seconds under the right conditions, reveals a study by virologists at Imperial College London, which was commissioned by Water Babies and Swim England.

The findings, which have not been published in a peer-reviewed journal, suggest the risk of transmission of Covid-19 in swimming pool water is incredibly low, as indoor swimming pools and leisure centres reopen across the UK from 12th April as part of the government’s roadmap to ease lockdown restrictions.

Founder of Water Babies, Paul Thompson said: “We are excited about these findings as we prepare to restart our classes and plan to welcome back families, little ones and customers to indoor swimming pools across the country. It has been fantastic to work closely with Professor Barclay and her team at Imperial College and collaborate with leading bodies Swim England and RLSS on this world-leading research. We know swimming has multiple benefits for physical and mental health for both children and adults of all ages and we’re looking forward to our lessons restarting.”

The study into swimming pool water was undertaken by leading virologist and expert in respiratory viruses, Professor Wendy Barclay, together with research associate Dr Jonathan Brown and research technician Maya Moshe from Imperial College London and project managed by Alex Blackwell, Head of Pools and Facilities from Water Babies.

The collaborative study looked at the effects of swimming pool water on the virus that causes Covid-19, named SARS-CoV-2, to assess the amount of time and contact needed to inactivate the virus in varying chlorine and pH levels. The research established that 1.5mg per litre of free chlorine with a pH between 7-7.2 reduced the infectivity of the virus by more than 1000 fold within 30 seconds. Additional testing of different free chlorine and pH ranges confirmed that chlorine in swimming pool water was more effective with a lower pH. This is inline with current guidance for swimming pool operation.

The research was also supported by Swim England, the national governing body for swimming in England and the Royal Life Saving Society, the UK’s leading provider of water safety and drowning prevention education.

Professor Wendy Barclay, Imperial College, explained: “We performed these experiments at our high containment laboratories in London. Under these safe conditions we are able to measure the ability of the virus to infect cells, which is the first step in its transmission. By mixing the virus with swimming pool water that was delivered to us by the Water Babies team, we could show that the virus does not survive in swimming pool water: it was no longer infectious. That, coupled with the

huge dilation factor of virus that might find its way into a swimming pool from an infected person, suggests the chance of contracting Covid-19 from swimming pool water is negligible.”

Jane Nickerson, Swim England chief executive, said: “We’re delighted to have played a key role alongside Imperial College London, Water Babies and RLSS UK in this world-first piece of research.

“These findings suggest the risk of transmission from swimming pool water is low, and adds to the evidence that swimming pools can be safe and secure environments if appropriate measures are taken.

“With indoor pools being allowed to reopen on Monday 12 April, it’s fantastic news for the operators, our members and clubs who take part in all our amazing sports, recreational swimmers and those who rely on the water to stay physically active.

“The findings confirm the guidance we have issued to operators is correct and will give everyone returning to the water peace of mind that they are doing so safely.”

For more information, contact:

Water Babies:

Fiona Call / Laura Stewart

Houston – WaterBabies@houston.co.uk / 0204 529 0549

Notes to editors

If you wish to set up an interview with Paul Thompson, please contact Fiona Call / Laura Stewart on 0204 529 0549 or email WaterBabies@houston.co.uk

Since it was co-founded by Paul Thompson in 2002, Water Babies has grown into the world’s largest baby swim school, today teaching more than 52,000 babies every week through a network of family businesses across the UK, Ireland, Canada, The Netherlands and China.

With the support of over 76 franchise outlets and around 600 teachers, Water Babies has won numerous national consumer awards over the last few years, including Best Swimming Class, Best Baby Development Activity, and Best Baby & Toddler Development Activity 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014 and 2015 with What’s on 4 Little Ones. In 2017, Water Babies was crowned Best Franchised/Licensed Pre-Schooler Activity’ and awarded Highly Commended in the Best Franchised/Licensed Baby & Toddler Activity category; while Water Babies very own Splash Mirror was voted the Best Product Supporting Children’s Activities at Home.

Water Babies is the only baby swimming school with its own pool consultancy services, passing on its expertise to pools across the UK, Ireland Canada, The Netherlands, and China. Water Babies is also the only swim company to have its own in-house, award-winning underwater baby photography unit. In 2019, more than 250,000 individual underwater shots were taken by its skilled photographers.

Water Babies swimming teachers are the best-trained baby swimming teachers in the world and the *only* ones who can obtain the National Governing Body-*Swim England’s* highest teaching qualification for under 5s.

Swim England notes to editors



If you wish to set up an interview with Jane Nickerson, please contact Ian Whadcoat, communications manager, on 07970 017439 or email ian.whadcoat@swimming.org

About Swim England

Formally known as the Amateur Swimming Association, Swim England is the national governing body for swimming in England. It helps people learn how to swim, enjoy the water safely, and compete in all aquatic sports.

Swim England's vision is of a nation swimming and it strives to inspire everyone to enjoy the water in the way that suits them. Each month millions of people are able to enjoy swimming, diving, water polo and artistic swimming, having been through the Swim England Learn to Swim Programme. Swim England also supports its members, clubs and athletes, and runs qualification and education programmes to develop the workforce. For more information visit swimming.org.swimengland