Swim Lessons

Surprise! Sharing a snorkel has no HIV risk

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Sharing needles, sharing snorkels, it all spreads HIV, right? So thought a suburban Chicago mom two years ago when her then-9-year-old son swapped pool gear with a black boy at a local community center. When the woman threatened to sue and demanded that the child be tested for HIV, the community center complied. The black boy's mom ("Mary Doe"), who said she only agreed to the test after she was told she could lose day-care privileges, is now suing the Wheaton Illinois Outreach Community Ministries and the Glen Ellyn Health Clinic for racial discrimination and the illegal release of HIV test results (he tested negative). "My son felt dirty about the whole thing," Doe said. "I want Outreach and the doctors to admit they were wrong so he'll know there is nothing wrong with him."

"Twenty years into the epidemic, everyone knows you can't get AIDS from a snorkel, but when you're talking about a black kid, everyone is willing to forget what they know," said the ACLU's Roger Leishman, who's representing Doe and her son. The white mom, who Leishman said was acting out of "fear and prejudice," is not cited in the suit, which is expected to go to trial soon. Doe is asking for more than $15,000 in damages and that the community center establish guidelines to guarantee it doesn't happen again.

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