

July 10, 2014



‘No Swim’ advisory issued for Bird Key Park, west side of Ringling Causeway in Sarasota

SARASOTA COUNTY — Sarasota County health officials have issued a "No Swim" advisory for Bird Key Park on the west side of the Ringling Causeway in Sarasota.

The “No Swim” advisory is due to elevated levels of enterococci (enteric) bacteria, some of which are naturally present in the environment, on Thursday, July 10.

Enteric bacteria can come from a variety of natural and man-made sources including pet waste, livestock, wildlife, stormwater runoff, and human sewage from failed septic systems and sewage spills. The county’s response team has ruled out sewage spills and determined that the cause is likely due to natural sources.

At Bird Key Park (west side of the Ringling Causeway), an approved dog park, the team determined that pet owners have not been picking up after their pets. Even though the pet waste stations were well-stocked with plastic bags for picking up the waste and garbage cans for disposal, large amounts of pet waste had been left along the beach in close proximity to the water’s edge. Rainfall in the area produced stormwater flow that washes not only the pet waste, but other pollutants, including bacteria from birds and wildlife, into the bay and is likely a source. The team observed a heavy accumulation of decaying marine algae, which can also be a source of bacteria, in the water and along the shoreline.

This follows recent “no swim” advisories in Sarasota County including one in Nokomis Beach which was lifted two days ago.

Signage advising the public not to swim or engage in water recreation at Bird Key Park Beach will remain in place until follow-up water testing results meet the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recreational water safety standards. The results of follow-up water testing will be available on Saturday, July 11.

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“The Florida Healthy Beaches program protects beach goers from conditions unsuitable for swimming by sampling beach water and providing accurate and up-to-date explanations of the results,” said Tom Higginbotham, Florida Department of Health Environmental Administrator.

Testing has revealed bacteria levels within acceptable limits at the following area beaches:

North Lido Beach
South Lido Beach
Lido Casino Beach
Siesta Key Beach

Longboat Key Public Beach
Turtle Beach
Nokomis Beach

North Jetty Beach
Venice Beach
Venice Fishing Pier
Service Club Beach
Brohard Beach
Caspersen Beach
Manasota Key Beach
Blind Pass Beach

Local health officials emphasize that people can still visit and enjoy the beach. However, residents and visitors are urged to take precautions by not wading or swimming in the water or engaging in water recreation at Bird Key Park Beach until the advisory is lifted.

In addition, shellfish such as crabs and shrimp collected in the immediate area of Bird Key Park should not be consumed. However, it is safe to fish and consume fin-fish from these waters.

The “no-swim” advisories are based on elevated levels of “enteric” bacteria, some of which are naturally present in the environment. Enteric bacteria can come from a variety of natural and man-made sources including pet waste, livestock, wildlife, stormwater runoff, and human sewage from failed septic systems and sewage spills.

“When these bacteria are detected in high concentrations in recreational waters, there is a risk that some people who swallow water while swimming or have contact with water entering the skin through a cut or sore may become ill with gastrointestinal illnesses, infections or rashes.” says Higginbotham. “This can be prevented by taking the appropriate precautions especially while the advisory is in effect.”

“Our world-class beaches are a wonderful asset to our community,” said Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County. “When making beach day plans, be sure to check the latest reports on beach conditions.”

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For more information:

- Visit <https://ourgulfenvironment.scgov.net> and click on water monitoring and then bacterial testing to check beach water testing results of area Gulf beaches.
- Call 941-BEACHES (941-232-2437) or visit www.mote.org/beaches. Click on the same link to the mobile-friendly version of the beach conditions report.
- The local visitor and convention bureau known as Visit Sarasota County also provides extensive information about the Sarasota area, including its beaches. The website is www.visitsarasota.org.

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MEDIA NOTES: A news release will be issued when the advisory is lifted.

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DOH-Sarasota website: www.sarasotahealth.org

Our Gulf Environment website: <https://ourgulfenvironment.scgov.net>