Potentially life-threatening bacteria found in Fort Myers creek

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FORT MYERS, Fla. - Waterkeepers found bacteria, six times the level it takes to close beaches, in a creek that empties into the Caloosahatchee.

Calusa Waterkeepers discovered the contamination at Billy's Creek and brought it to the Fort Myers City Council.

"This particular water body is on the consistently in the 3, 4, 500 range, way above the beach closure threshold of 71," said John Cassani, Calusa Waterkeeper.

Those levels are enough to make anyone sick and could cause life-threatening infections.

"There's growing concern that there are antibiotic-resistant forms of this bacteria, so if you get it, particularly if you have a cut or something, you could get a really bad infection," said Cassani.

While some city officials say they wouldn't mind swimming in the creek, Cassani warns against that mentality.

"Well the PIO has said it's safe for recreation, [but] I have to say I disagree with that," said Cassani. "I don't think it's safe for recreation, particularly primary contact. I would not do it."

The Calusa Waterkeepers are urging the City to put up more specific warning signs along the five-mile stretch of Billy's Creek.

"There needs to be appropriate signage on the creek that informs people of the actual public health risk, not just the generic no swimming sign," said Cassani. "They need to know why they shouldn't be in the water."

City of Fort Myers Mayor Randall Henderson feels confident the City Council will be able to work with other agencies to find a solution.

"We're gonna get data to help us see how we can address that and we're going to do that sooner than later," said Mayor Henderson. "This is a priority, and it's an important priority."

Fort Myers and Lee County are conducting additional testing this week in hopes of finding the cause of this contamination.

"It's important for us as policymakers, and senior leaders, the staff of the city, to work in partnership with other agencies and Lee County and the state of Florida," said Mayor Henderson. "So that we're all aiming toward a common plan, a common goal."

The City does not know yet when the research results will be in. Once they know where the contamination is coming from, they say they will develop a long-term solution.

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