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DOH: Stay out of water at Sanibel's Blind Pass Beach

By Chad Gillis

<http://www.news-press.com/story/news/2015/10/30/health-officials-say-stay-out-water-blind-pass-beach-bacteria-enterococcus-sanibel/74861448/>

The advisory will continue until test results indicate acceptable health levels; the agency will not have new test results until Tuesday



(Photo: File)

The state is warning people not to enter the water at Blind Pass Beach in Sanibel due to high bacteria levels there.

"Water contact may pose an increased risk of disease, particularly for susceptible individuals," an advisory from the Florida Department of Health in Lee County reads. "No wading or swimming at Blind Pass Beach is recommended."

The advisory is in place until Tuesday, when the next water quality samples are taken. The state will issue an update then.

Exposure to the bacteria can lead to an increased risk of diarrhea and gastrointestinal pain due to gastroenteritis illness.

The elevated levels of the bacteria is associated with pollution such as storm water runoff, sewage and animal waste. Enterococcus is normally found in the digestive systems of humans and animals.

Rick Bartleson, a water quality scientist with the Sanibel-Captive Conservation Foundation, said Friday these higher counts are not uncommon considering recent weather patterns.

The wet season ended earlier this month, and that lack of rain allowed various bacteria to build up on the landscape.

Although the first three weeks of October produced nearly 2 inches below average of precipitation, more than an inch of that gap was erased this week as rain fell across much of the region.

That rain carried the nutrients that fed the bloom.

"We did have a lot of rain earlier this week and whenever we have rain that washes bacteria off the land surface," Bartleson explained. "We see that frequently after rain. Apparently even lawns have enterococcus, so it's possibly from birds that poop on lawns or vegetation."

The high bacteria level was found after a routine test of the water on Thursday.

In other harmful algal bloom news, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation has reported red tide along the Southwest Florida coast, from the Tampa Bay area to the northern border of Lee County, in recent weeks

Karenia brevis causes red tide in this region, and recent counts have been as high as 1 million cells per liter off Sarasota County. FWC released a report Friday that showed less dense concentrations.

This latest bloom of *Karenia brevis* has stayed north of Lee waters.