



100 Polk County Plaza • Suite 180 • Balsam Lake, WI 54810 • 715-485-8500 • FAX 715-485-8501

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Brian Hobbs, RS, Environmental Health Specialist
Polk County Health Department
715/485-8532

County Testing Results in Swimming Advisory on Big Butternut Beach

The Polk County Health Department has issued a swimming advisory on Big Butternut Beach due to high levels of *Fecal Coliform Bacteria*. High levels have been confirmed in conclusive water tests done July 22 and July 29, 2020. The swimming advisory will remain in effect until two consecutive tests resulting in acceptable levels are obtained. Wisconsin State Statute, 254.46, gives local health departments the authority to restrict swimming if a human health hazard exists.

The testing consists of sampling for fecal coliform bacteria, an indicator of human and animal waste contamination. Current test methods cannot detect all pathogens (disease-causing organisms) or give instantaneous results. Testing requires 24 to 48 hours of incubation before problems can be detected, leaving ample time for exposure to occur. Current analytical methods do not distinguish between human and animal waste contamination.

Swimming in unsafe water may result in minor illnesses such as ear, eye, nose and throat infections, the most common being gastroenteritis (upset stomach). Children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems are at a greater risk of getting sick when they ingest contaminated water.

The Polk County Health Department recommends swimmers take caution when swimming at any beach, especially after heavy rains. Bacteria counts usually rise after a rainstorm at all beaches. The most frequent source of fecal bacteria contamination is waterfowl.

If you are concerned about “swimmer’s itch”, a type of dermatitis causing a rash and itching, swimmers should rub off with a rough towel *before* the water film dries on the skin surface. An immediate fresh shower after leaving the water is also effective.

For more information about swimming beach monitoring and safety, you can call the Polk County Health Department at 485-8532. Updates regarding swimming advisories in Polk County can be found at www.polkcountyhealthdept.org.