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County Testing Re-Opens Swimming Beach

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The Polk County Health Department has re-opened Half Moon beach on 200th Ave Milltown. Two consecutive samples have indicated an acceptable level of *Fecal Coliform Bacteria*. Big Butternut beach in Luck is still indicating high levels of bacteria and will remain closed until further notice.

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 come in contact with 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 sources of disease-causing microorganisms are waterfowl fecal contamination, sewage overflows, polluted city or agricultural storm water runoff, sewage treatment plant malfunctions, boating wastes and malfunctioning septic systems.

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 or try the BEACH Watch Website at <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/beaches/>.

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