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June 12th, 2023

Benzie and Leelanau Beaches Testing Begins June 14th

The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay in partnership with Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department (BLDHD) will begin its annual beach testing on June 14, 2023. Eight area beaches in Benzie and Leelanau counties will be tested for harmful E. coli bacteria every Wednesday through September 6th.

Beach test results will be available by midday on Thursdays and posted shortly thereafter on the BLDHD's website and Facebook page. This year, we have created a new dashboard to display beach testing results. If test results show elevated bacteria levels, BLDHD will contact local officials and recommend advisories be posted at impacted beaches. Beaches with elevated results will be re-tested until results return to acceptable levels.

Elevated bacteria levels, including E. coli, at beaches pose a threat to public health and cause illness, especially in young children and people with compromised immune systems. The presence of E. coli in surface water indicates fecal contamination is present at the beach, which includes a host of other harmful viruses and bacteria.

"Thousands of people enjoy our beautiful beaches each summer," said Eric Johnston, Director of Environmental Health. "It just makes good public health sense to provide them with the tools and tips to make an informed decision about when and where to swim."

Beachgoers are encouraged to take simple actions to reduce the risk of E. coli at beaches such as not feeding ducks and other birds, disposing of diapers (including swim diapers) in trash cans, and having young children take frequent bathroom breaks. Beach goers are also reminded not to swim near storm drains, especially during and immediately after a rain event, as water from the storm drain may contain E. coli and other harmful pathogens from animal feces that are washed into the drains during a storm. The risk of elevated E. coli levels after a rain event decreases as sunlight breaks down the bacteria in open water.

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