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## **Sarasota area “no swim” advisory issued for Bird Key Park west of the Ringling Causeway bridge**

A “no swim” advisory has been issued for Bird Key Park, a recently renovated recreational area directly west of the Ringling Causeway bridge on the north side of Bird Key. Sarasota County Health Department officials received testing results from beach water samples taken on Wednesday, Oct. 10 that show an elevated level of enterococci (enteric) bacteria.

Other Sarasota County area beaches that are **not under a “no swim” advisory** are Longboat Key Public Beach, North and South Lido Beaches, Lido Casino Beach, Siesta Key Beach, Turtle Beach, Nokomis Beach, North Jetty Beach, Venice Beach, Service Club Beach, Venice Fishing Pier, Brohard Beach, Caspersen Beach, Manasota Key and Blind Pass Beach.

“We never like to issue advisories and are sensitive to their impact on the community. However, the intent of the Florida Healthy Beaches program is to provide residents and visitors with accurate, up-to-date information about the water quality at our 16 area beaches,” says Sarasota County Health Department Environmental Administrator Tom Higginbotham.

Local health officials emphasize that people can still visit and enjoy the beach. However, residents and visitors are urged not to wade or swim in the water or engage in water recreation until the advisory is lifted. Shellfish collected in the immediate area of the Ringling Causeway (Bird Key Park recreation area) or any beach water that has a brown tint should not be consumed; however, it is safe to fish and consume fin-fish from these waters.

Signage advising the public not to swim or engage in water recreation at of the Ringling Causeway (Bird Key Park recreation area) will remain in place until follow-up water testing results meet the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recreational water safety standards. The Health Department plans to conduct follow-up water sampling on Friday, Oct. 12 with results expected in the afternoon on Saturday, Oct. 13.

The EPA water quality standards are very protective of human health. The “no-swim” advisories are based on elevated levels of indicator bacteria, some of which are naturally present in the environment. “We know that these bacteria inhabit the intestines of warm-blooded humans and animals. Therefore, when these bacteria are detected in high concentrations in recreational waters, there is a risk that some people who swallow water while swimming or have contact with water entering the skin through a cut or sore may become ill with gastrointestinal illnesses, infections or rashes,” says Tom Higginbotham.

Enteric bacteria can come from a variety of sources including stormwater runoff, pet waste and wildlife and human sewage. The local rapid response team comprised of officials from Sarasota County Environmental Utilities and the City of Sarasota Utilities has ruled out sewage spills, storm water outfalls, and runoff from heavy rainfall as contributing factors to the elevated bacteria levels. Since Bird Key Park is an approved recreational area for dogs, enteric bacteria from pet waste cannot be ruled out.

“Our world-class beaches are a wonderful asset to our community. When making beach day plans, be sure to check the latest reports on beach conditions,” says Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County.

- Visit [www.OurGulfEnvironment.net](http://www.OurGulfEnvironment.net) and click on water monitoring and then bacterial testing to check beach water testing results of area Gulf beaches
- Call 941-BEACHES (941-232-2437)
- The Visitors Center also provides extensive information about Sarasota including its beaches. The website is [www.visitsarasota.org](http://www.visitsarasota.org).

**MEDIA NOTE:** A news release will be issued when the advisory is lifted.

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