



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ADVISES PUBLIC TO STAY OUT OF WATER AT KAHALUU LAGOON

HONOLULU – The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) is advising the public to stay out of the water at Kahaluu Lagoon and the channel leading to Kaneohe Bay in Windward Oahu. Recent water samples taken in the area show abnormally high readings of bacteria indicating contamination from sewage at multiple monitoring sites. Caution signs are posted around the affected area advising people to avoid swimming or entering the water. DOH will conduct additional investigations and studies to find the source(s) of the unusually high test results and determine further follow up activities.

“One likely source of the high bacteria readings from the water at Kahaluu Lagoon may be the large concentration of residential cesspools in this area that discharge untreated human waste into the groundwater,” said Gary Gill, deputy director of environmental health. “This untreated sewage contains pathogens that can spread disease, as well as nutrients that can degrade water quality and harm coral reefs. With this potential source of contamination, the department will conduct further studies to determine the extent of the problem and what can be done to protect people and the environment.”

The DOH Clean Water Branch began testing of Kahaluu Lagoon for harmful bacteria in response to a report from the Kahaluu Neighborhood Board (KNB) that canoe paddlers, boaters and fishermen were developing infections and illnesses after entering the recreational waters of the lagoon and stream. “We heard the reports of open sores and skin rashes from the community and relayed them to the DOH,” said KNB Chair Flora Obayashi. “We appreciate the investigative work that the DOH is doing to trace the source of the high levels of bacteria and move to solve this problem of infections and illness threatening the health of our community.”

High levels of both *enterococcus* and *clostridium* bacteria in water may indicate the presence of sewage. Sewage contains pathogens (bacteria, protozoa, and viruses) that may cause gastroenteritis, hepatitis A, conjunctivitis, leptospirosis, salmonellosis, and cholera. The DOH Clean Water Branch’s Monitoring Section routinely tests for *enterococcus* and *clostridium* as part of its regular monitoring schedule. More information on the area of concern and scientific basis for the warning is available at

DOH reminds individuals to take precautions and avoid entering recreational waters with open cuts, wounds, or abrasions. Individuals with open wounds or weakened immune systems are at increased risk for infection. Keep cuts or open wounds clean and covered with bandages to help shield against bacteria entering through the skin and causing infection. Whether you have wounds or not, be sure to clean exposed areas with soap and water after swimming. Monitor cuts or open wounds and let your doctor or other healthcare provider know of any increasing warmth, redness, swelling, and pain.

Other good hygiene practices that help decrease the risk of getting skin infections include:

- Keeping your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Avoiding contact with other people's wounds or bandages
- Avoiding sharing personal items such as towels or razors

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