Summer is the time of the year when most families head out to the local beaches for a day of “fun in the sun” activities. For over fourteen years now, Central Michigan District Health Department (CMDHD) has conducted a bathing beach monitoring program of public beaches in the six county district which includes Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola, and Roscommon counties. “The good news this year is that some funding has been restored through the Clean Michigan Initiative, so CMDHD will be able to sample the most heavily used and potential problem public bathing/swimming beaches throughout our service area. Historically “bacterially safe” and smaller beaches as well as campgrounds, children’s camps open to the public have been asked by the health department to either implement a water sampling program that meets the State standards and post notices at the sites to inform the public as to whether or not the water has been tested for E. coli bacteria”, stated Michelle Patton, Director of Environmental Health Services with the Central Michigan District Health Department. “If you don’t see a posting at the public beach advising whether the beach is monitored and how to find the results of testing, you should contact the beach manager or local municipality responsible for the beach to request they post the beach”, advises Director Patton.

“Restoring some of the funding to test public beaches that are inland waters in our district will be a great service to our residents and visitors this year. Our funding also extends to the beaches along the Lake Huron/Saginaw Bay in Arenac County. We have informed all the Municipalities and Beach Managers in our six counties where these inland lakes and rivers are located as to whether we will be sampling and of the requirement to post their beaches IF they are not tested for E.coli bacteria according to the Michigan Water Quality Standards for public beaches. We have also offered to work with these Beach Managers to assist them if they choose to undertake a sampling program.” states Ms. Patton.

Surface waters contaminated with high concentrations of *E. coli* bacteria can result in “stomach flu” type symptoms including nausea, vomiting, stomachache, diarrhea, headache and fever. Other minor illnesses associated with swimming in contaminated waters include ear, eye, nose
and throat infections and skin rashes. In highly polluted waters, swimmers run the risk of exposure to more serious diseases like dysentery, hepatitis, cholera and typhoid fever. “By monitoring our public swimming areas throughout the summer season, we can ensure public safety by warning of high levels of harmful bacteria”, said Ms. Patton.

When it comes to making a personal decision as to which beaches to spend your summer days on, keep in mind the following tips:

- Large amounts of waterfowl present (geese, ducks) could mean an increased amount of “bird droppings” which may contain high concentrations of *E. coli* bacteria or could even lead to swimmers itch
- Do not swim in public beaches if you have open sores or lesions on your body
- Research the number of closings the beach has had in the most recent years (check our website at [www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org), for this information)
- If there has been a heavy rain event within the past 48 hours, use caution in swimming due to possible runoff and higher levels of bacteria in the water
- If the water is discolored with a greenish, blue, or milky look this may indicate an algae bloom. Certain algae blooms can produce toxins that could make someone ill
- Public beaches that are used by a large number of people, especially small children, could contain body fluids and fecal matter
- Talk to the local residents who often times have a good perspective on the history of the beach
- Don’t swim where the beach has an overabundance of trash and litter
- Dry off immediately with a clean towel after getting out of the water. It’s also a good idea to take a shower after spending a day at the beach. These tips may help reduce your chance of getting swimmer’s itch too.

For more information on the beach monitoring program and results, log onto our website at [www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org) and click on the Public Beach Monitoring Information link.

This article has been brought to you by Central Michigan District Health Department, which serves the counties of Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola and Roscommon. Visit our website at [www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org), LIKE Central Michigan District Health Department on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @CMiDHD.

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*To request an interview, please visit our website (cmdhd.org) and fill out the Media Interview Request Form.*