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Health advisory issued for water contact at Harris Beach State Park

A public health advisory was issued Thursday due to higher-than-normal levels of bacteria in ocean waters at Harris Beach State Park in Curry County.

Increased pathogen and fecal bacteria levels in ocean waters can come from both shore and inland sources such as storm water runoff, sewer overflows, failing septic systems and even animal waste from livestock, pets and wildlife.

Water samples indicate higher-than-normal levels of fecal bacteria, which can result in gastroenteritis, skin rashes, upper respiratory infections and other illnesses. Direct contact with the water should be avoided until the advisories are lifted, especially for children and the elderly, who may be more vulnerable to waterborne bacteria.

While these advisories are in effect at Harris Beach State Park, visitors should avoid wading in nearby creeks or in discolored water, and stay clear of water runoff flowing into the ocean. Even if there is no advisory in effect, officials recommend avoiding swimming in the ocean within 48 hours after a rainstorm.

State officials advise that the status of water contact advisories at beaches is subject to change. For the most recent information on advisories, please visit www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/beaches/index.shtml or call 877-290-6767.

Although state officials discourage water contact, they continue to encourage other recreational activities on these beaches because they pose no health risk even during an advisory. Neighboring beaches are not affected by this advisory.

Since 2003, state officials have used a federal Environmental Protection Agency grant to monitor popular Oregon beaches and make timely reports to the public about elevated levels of fecal bacteria. Oregon state agencies participating in this program are DHS, DEQ and Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. More detailed test results are available at www.healthoregon.org/beach.

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