County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY
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Press Release

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CAPITOLA BEACH REOPENS; PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE CONTINUED CAUTION

CAPITOLA, CA — Santa Cruz County Public Health officials have lifted the closure of Capitola Beach following a review of additional laboratory results from samples collected November 4 and consultation with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH).

Based on these findings, Public Health officials determined that reopening the beach is appropriate. While the beach is open, a health advisory remains in effect because disease-causing *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) O157:H7 can persist in the environment. Residents and visitors are encouraged to take reasonable precautions, particularly around areas contaminated by bird droppings, and around water and sediment from the Soquel Creek Lagoon.

On November 10th, the Santa Cruz County Public Health Officer temporarily closed Capitola Beach following reports of nine cases of *E. coli* O157:H7 infection. Four cases involve Santa Cruz County residents, while five involve residents of other Bay Area counties all linked, indicating a common source or related exposures. All nine cases have been among children, three were hospitalized, and one case of hemolytic uremic syndrome, a serious complication, has been reported.

Environmental testing by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) detected the outbreak strain *E. coli* O157:H7 in water and sediment from Soquel Creek Lagoon, as well as in sediment at the lagoon's flume outlet near Capitola Beach. Final laboratory results are expected next week and will be posted on the County's Environmental Health website when available.

Preliminary investigation findings suggest birds as the source associated with the outbreak, not a sewage spill or raw sewage leak or other human source. Birds can shed *E. coli* O157:H7 in their droppings without appearing sick. These droppings can contaminate water, soil and sediment.

"Although the beach has reopened, residents should continue to exercise caution," said Dr. Lisa B. Hernandez, Santa Cruz County Public Health Officer. "Due to natural wave activity, shifting sand, and the movement of birds throughout the beach, the bacteria could be present in any area of the beach."

The potential risk of exposure to *E. coli* shed by birds can occur at any beach or other location where birds congregate.

Public Health officials recommend the following precautions:

- Follow posted closure signs and public health advisories.
- Avoid drinking untreated water from creeks, lagoons or other natural waterbodies.
- Keep children away from the lagoon and where water flows from the lagoon to the ocean.
- Do not let children play in lagoon mud or disturb sediment.
- Keep children away from bird droppings.
  Wash hands with soap and water after outdoor activities and before eating.
- Avoid swimming with open wounds and around where the lagoon drains into the ocean. Shower after contact with natural waterways.
- Keep pets out of potentially contaminated water and provide them with clean drinking water.

About *E. coli* O157:H7:

E. coli O157:H7 can cause severe gastrointestinal illness, including diarrhea that may be bloody, abdominal cramps and vomiting. In some cases, particularly among young children, E. coli infection can lead to hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a serious complication that can cause kidney failure, which may be life threatening.

Anyone experiencing concerning symptoms should contact a health care provider. People with bloody diarrhea or signs of dehydration should seek prompt medical attention.

For more information:

- Find local water quality updates, visit the County of Santa Cruz Environmental Health Division's webpage at scceh.org/BeachAdvisories
- For more information about reducing exposure to germs in recreational water, visit the CDC's Healthy Swimming guidance
- CDC | Signs of Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS)

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