

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Florida Department of Health in Lee County
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Caution reminded around red tide

Fort Myers, FL—The Florida Department of Health in Lee County is reminding people to use caution when on the beach or in waters with high concentrations of red tide. Adverse health effects on humans and pets can be prevented by staying away from affected areas until the wind moves the bloom further offshore.

Staff from the health department, Lee County Parks and Recreation and Mote Marine Laboratories continues to monitor beaches for signs of red tide. Results show spotty patches of the toxin creating fish kills, discolored water and minor respiratory irritation on some local beaches.

Consider these facts:

- **Most people can swim in red tide, but it can cause skin irritation and burning eyes. If one's skin is easily irritated, avoid red tide water. If one experiences irritation, get out and thoroughly wash off with fresh water. Swimming near dead fish is not recommended.**
- **Wear shoes when walking on the sand to avoid the possibility of a puncture wound from fish bones, especially catfish spines.**
- **Symptoms from breathing red tide toxins usually include coughing, sneezing and teary eyes. For most people, symptoms are temporary when red tide toxins are in the air. Wearing a particle filter mask may lessen the effects, and research shows that using over-the-counter antihistamines may decrease symptoms. Check the marine forecast. Fewer toxins are in the air when the wind is blowing offshore.**
- **People with chronic respiratory problems like asthma and COPD should avoid red tide areas. People with symptoms that persist should seek medical attention.**
- **Pet owners are advised that red tide poses a risk to animals brought to the beach. Red tide can affect dogs after they come out of the water, lick their paws or fur and ingest the algae which can be harmful to their health.**
- **Residents living in beach areas affected by Florida Red Tide are advised to close windows and run the air conditioner (making sure that the AC filter is maintained according to manufacturer's specifications).**

- **Commercial seafood found in restaurants and grocery stores is safe to eat because it comes from red tide-free water and is monitored by the government.**
- **Recreational fishermen:**
 1. **Do not eat mollusks (clams or oysters) taken from red tide waters, as they contain toxins that cause a food poisoning called NSP (Neurotoxic Shellfish Poisoning). Shell fishing remains closed in Pine Island Sound.**
 2. **Finfish caught live can be eaten if filleted.**
 3. **Shrimp and crabs are safe to eat.**
 4. **Use common sense: harvesting distressed or dead animals is not advised under any circumstances. Edible parts of other animals (crustaceans such as crabs, shrimp, and lobsters) are not affected by red tide and can be eaten.**

Beachgoers are encouraged to check the Mote Beach Conditions Report before they go to the beach as conditions can change daily. For the latest conditions at all Lee County beaches, visit www.mote.org/beaches or call 941-BEACHES.

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