

Connecting Point

A MID MICHIGAN DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER



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IS IT SAFE TO GO IN THE WATER?

Perhaps you have been to Alma recently and have seen the sign placed beside the Pine River by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department advising people to be cautious when they use the river because of bacteria. Or you may have been invited to one of the community meetings where people have been discussing the health of the Pine, Flat and Maple rivers. The Health Department receives many inquiries about whether it is safe to use the rivers at all. We even received a question as to whether it is safe to hold the Joe Scholtz Memorial Free Fishing Derby in St. Louis. In this article I want to explain when it might not be safe and some simple precautions everyone can take so we can continue to enjoy our rivers.

What we are concerned about is bacteria and other pathogens that may be in the water and make people sick if they swim in it or touch it (for example boating or fishing). The main sources of these pathogens are animal and human feces. One important source is livestock. The number of farm animals in our area is increasing and their manure is spread as fertilizer on fields to dispose of it, but sometimes it runs into the rivers after being spread. Human feces is getting into the water because our septic systems are aging and beginning to fail. When a septic system fails the bacteria travel through the ground water and into the rivers.

To understand whether there are dangerous levels of bacteria in the water we measure one particular species, E. coli. E. coli is usually harmless, but some varieties are very dangerous. And if human E. coli is in the water it means other human disease causing organisms may be also.

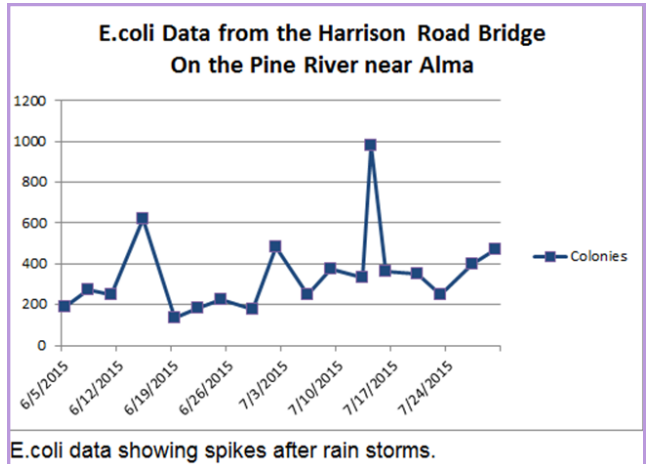
E. coli have been measured in the Pine, Flat and Maple Rivers* and this is what we find: The rivers are usually safe, but sometimes they are not, and at least one place is usually not safe. Fortunately the rivers are not safe at times that are predictable and that is 48 hours after a rainstorm. When it rains feces are washed into the water and the groundwater gets moving and bacteria levels rise. By about two days later the bacteria have been washed down stream or have died. So avoid the rivers immediately after a big rain event. The one place we have located where there are always high levels of bacteria is the mill pond on the Pine River in Alma. That is why we posted the signs there.

The best thing to do when you use the rivers is to bring hand sanitizer, avoid touching your mouth and wash your hands before touching food. Make sure your children do the same.

I'd like to end by saying these issues are part of a bigger problem, the increasing levels of nutrients in the water that can cause algae blooms, including toxic algae, and can cause oxygen levels to fall, killing fish. In the long run we need to ensure that nutrients (including feces) don't get into the water in the first place.

*Thank you to the Kent Conservation District, the Clinton Conservation District and Alma College for collecting and sharing data on the rivers.

Marcus Cheatham, PhD, Health Officer



Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Vaccine Is Recommended for Boys, Too



Many parents have heard that the HPV vaccine protects girls from cervical cancer. It is less commonly known that the HPV vaccine is recommended for boys, too. Both boys and girls can be infected with HPV. HPV causes virtually all cases of cervical cancer, as well as cancers of the mouth, throat, and penis. HPV also causes genital and anal warts. Vaccinating boys prevents them from spreading HPV to girls, stopping those diseases caused by HPV right in their tracks.

“Okay, HPV is bad, but my kid is only 11. Can’t I just wait until he’s older to decide whether to get the vaccine?” Parents may choose to wait for their son or daughter to get the HPV vaccine, but in order for it to work, it must be given before the person is exposed. That’s why the HPV vaccine is recommended for all adolescents aged 11 through 12 years.

Teens and adults can be exposed to HPV by intimate skin-to-skin contact. The virus is so common that nearly all sexually-active men and women will get it at some point in their lives, even if they don’t show signs or get symptoms. HPV is a pretty clever virus. Once a person is infected, HPV hides from the immune system and can remain in the body for life. Vaccination prevents infection from ever taking hold in the first place.

The HPV vaccine has an excellent safety record. Since 2006, nearly 80 million doses of the vaccine have been given in the United States without any serious safety concerns. Reported side effects are only mild and temporary, including pain in the arm where the shot was given, fever, dizziness, and nausea. Many people who get the HPV vaccine have no side effects at all.

The idea of vaccinating adolescents against a sexually-transmitted infection makes many people uncomfortable, for a variety of good reasons. But the truth of the matter is most kids will grow up into adults, and most adults will have sex at some point in their lives. The only sure way to protect adults from diseases caused by HPV is to vaccinate them when they are still kids.

If you haven’t already vaccinated your preteen or teen, it may not be too late. The Vaccines for Children program provides the HPV vaccine at no cost to children younger than 19 who are uninsured, Medicaid-eligible, American Indian or Alaskan Native. MMDHD is also able to vaccinate uninsured or underinsured adults ages 19-26 within certain high risk conditions. Even if you have insurance, you may be eligible for help. To learn more, please contact the Mid-Michigan District Health Department branch office nearest you or visit our website at www.mmdhd.org

Alcohol and Youth

Alcohol is the most widely misused substance among America’s youth. Parents often underestimate the number of teenagers who use alcohol, the amount of alcohol they consume, and the nature and extent of the consequences for both drinkers and nondrinkers. Adolescent alcohol use is a serious threat to adolescent development and health. One of the best things parents can do to prevent their children from using alcohol is to talk with them.

The Clinton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition (CSAPC) wants parents to know these facts on underage drinking and its impact on youth:

1. Recent studies show that alcohol consumption has the potential to trigger long-term biological changes that may have detrimental effects on the developing adolescent brain, including neuro-cognitive impairment.
2. Around 80% of children feel that parents should have a say in whether they drink alcohol.
3. A higher percentage of young people between the ages of 12 and 20 use alcohol than use tobacco or illicit drugs.
4. Underage drinking contributes to the likelihood of risky sexual behavior, including unwanted, unintended, and unprotected sexual activity, and sex with multiple partners, leading to increased risk of STD’s.
5. Underage drinking is responsible for more than 4,300 annual deaths among underage youth.
6. Underage drinking increases the risk of legal problems, physical and sexual assault, suicide and homicide, memory problems, and changes in the brain that may have long term effects.

For more information on the CSAPC, additional resources for parents, or referrals for early intervention or treatment services for teens please contact Polly Brainerd at 517-541-8913 or Pbrainerd@eatonresa.org, or Sara Thelen at 989-227-3140 or ssthe-len@mmdhd.org. Or, visit the coalition’s website at www.drugfreeclinton.org.

For alcohol prevention programs in Gratiot County, contact Ty Warczinsky, Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition, at 989-463-1422. In Montcalm County, contact Phillip Millerov, YOUTHINK Montcalm, at 989-831-7636.

For more information about these and other Health Department programs, contact:

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