

At least 20 E. coli cases reported after Lake Anna visits, Va. health says

Virginia officials are testing the lake water but so far have not put any special restrictions on using the reservoir.

By [Jenna Portnoy](#)

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CORRECTION

An earlier version of this story said both the Hiner twins received blood transfusions. Only Kinsley did. The story has been corrected.

Judy Inglett never dreamed her healthy 15-year-old daughter would end up on dialysis and undergo blood transfusions after swimming at [Lake Anna State Park](#) in Virginia over the Memorial Day weekend. Ava was there with family friends and neighbors who had invited her on their boat and rented a house, enjoying the festive recreation area as they have countless times before, her mother said.

Within days of coming home, though, Ava developed diarrhea. By the next week, she was in renal failure, her mother said, prompting doctors to rush her to a children's hospital, where she remained as of Wednesday. Ava is one of 20 people diagnosed with an E. coli infection — that for four children escalated to serious kidney complications — that investigators said triggered lake water testing that has left families second guessing their go-to summertime vacation spot.

"Her kidneys took a very hard hit. If we hadn't brought her in when we did, I could be planning a funeral at this point," Inglett, of Fauquier County, said Tuesday night after swapping bedside roles with her husband at Inova L.J. Murphy Children's Hospital. Everyone who reported becoming ill to the state swam or was otherwise exposed to lake water, but public health officials say they do not yet have enough information to know the lake is the culprit.

The state has not put any special restrictions on using the lake and encouraged swimmers and boaters to follow regular safety precautions like showering after swimming to wash off possible contaminants, and never drinking untreated water.

Escherichia coli, commonly known as E. coli, bacteria infections usually occur after someone ingests food or water contaminated with a small, often invisible, amount of animal or human feces, and symptoms typically develop in three to four days, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Of the people who came down with gastrointestinal symptoms typical of an E. coli infection after visiting Lake Anna, at least seven have been hospitalized, said Katherine G. McCombs, director of surveillance and investigation in the Virginia Department of Health Office of Epidemiology.

More than half of those sickened are children who generally have more serious reactions to the bacteria than adults. Four children developed severe cases and a condition known as hemolytic uremic syndrome, or HUS, which can cause kidney failure, she said.

Symptoms of an E. coli infection include stomach cramps and diarrhea that is often watery or bloody, vomiting, fever and chills. Health officials ask that anyone experiencing gastrointestinal illness after visiting the Lake Anna area during Memorial Day weekend or since contact their local health department and seek medical care if symptoms are ongoing. Lake Anna, a freshwater reservoir an hour from Richmond and Charlottesville, was created in the early '70s to cool a nuclear power plant operated by Dominion Energy, which returns warmer water to the lake.

Warmer water and nutrients can combine to make conditions favorable for algae growth — health officials say signs of algae activity have been detected at Lake Anna and are normal this time of year. The algae is not related to the current illnesses.

Staff from the Department of Environmental Quality on Tuesday collected six samples from three areas at the lake to be tested for concentrations of bacteria, including E. coli, said agency spokeswoman Irina Calos. Results are expected by Thursday or Friday, she said. Samples were taken from the sandbar near the confluence of Goldmine Creek, water adjacent to the state park and the Cocktail Cove sandbar. A second round of samples will be collected on June 25, Calos said.

Regular quarterly water quality samples taken by the Lake Anna Civic Association on June 4 did not show harmful levels of E. coli, said association president Greg Baker on Tuesday. He said he empathized with the families affected but believes there is no imminent risk to visiting the lake.

“The lake is open for business,” he said. “It appears the lake has no E. coli occurrences at this moment but please everybody use common sense. It is a lake, don’t drink the lake water, avoid large gatherings in the lake and enjoy the lake.”

Nate Hiner, whose 8-year-old daughter was diagnosed with HUS and treated with blood transfusions at Children’s National Hospital, said he is skeptical of testing that shows the lake is safe.

Eight-year old twins Chase and Kinsley Hiner, seen in St. Augustine, Fla., earlier this year, both came down with a severe illness after being diagnosed with an E. coli infection after swimming at Lake Anna over Memorial Day weekend. (Family photo)

“Over 20 cases of this illness with the commonality being this lake. That’s irrefutable evidence that there’s something in that water,” said Hiner, who lives in Spotsylvania.

He and his wife, Jennifer, who are both paramedics, and their twins hopped on a friend's boat on May 26 to visit the lake, as they have several times each summer for years. They stopped at a few spots where the children could get out and swim.

A few days later their daughter Kinsley developed severe diarrhea that by Friday contained bright red blood, sending them to the emergency room and after a week's hospital stay with no improvement, Children's National Hospital. The same day their son Chase began developing similar symptoms and soon both children were being treated at the hospital in Northwest Washington.

As of Tuesday, Chase was discharged and Kinsley was steadily improving after a brief transfer to intensive care for profuse bleeding.

Kinsley Hiner, 8, is receiving treatment at Children's National Hospital related to the E. coli infection. Her twin brother, Chase, had the same illness but has been discharged. (Family photo) "It's very terrifying because there's nothing these kids can take or do," Nate Hines said. Alexandra Yonts, a pediatric infectious-disease physician at Children's National Hospital, said children under 5 are at highest risk for illness.

"The biggest thing is good hand hygiene," she said. "This is something that is transmitted through a fecal-oral route. Somehow you come into contact with feces from an infected human or animal and it makes its way into your mouth."

Other culprits include undercooked meat such as hamburger, petting zoos and especially land-grazing animals like cows. Bodies of water near farms where runoff can wash harmful bacteria into the water, like Lake Anna, should be avoided after a big rainfall, Yonts said. Most infections from harmful strains of E. coli bacteria cause diarrhea and vomiting that require hydration at home, but about 5 to 15 percent of children with this infection develop HUS. Treatments for this serious condition range from monitoring in the hospital to dialysis, or artificial filtration of the blood, and about a quarter of cases will require long-term dialysis or even a kidney transplant, she said.

Inglett said her daughter Ava has had four rounds of dialysis and three blood transfusions. As of Tuesday night, doctors were taking a break from dialysis to give Ava's kidneys a chance to function normally.

"Right now, it's a wait and see," Inglett said through tears, wondering if her daughter will recover enough to play soccer and field hockey next school year.

"Nobody knew this was going to happen," she said. "She's been down there so many times and she's always been fine. It's a helpless feeling as a parent when you want to fix it and I can't fix it."

SOURCE: [Va. health investigates GI illnesses linked to Lake Anna State Park - The Washington Post](#)