

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IS INVESTIGATING A CLUSTER OF GASTROINTESTINAL ILLNESS IN THE LAKE ANNA AREA OVER THE MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

June 6, 2024

Media Contact: Brookie Crawford, brookie.crawford@vdh.virginia.gov

Virginia Department of Health is Investigating a Cluster of Gastrointestinal Illness in the Lake Anna area over the Memorial Day weekend

RICHMOND, Va. – The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is investigating a cluster of gastrointestinal (GI) illnesses in people who were in the Lake Anna area over the Memorial Day weekend. Some of the ill people have been diagnosed with *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) infections.

E. coli infection causes stomach cramps and diarrhea (often watery or bloody). Symptoms can also include vomiting, fever, and chills. In severe cases, the infection can damage organs, such as the kidneys, and lead to [hemolytic uremic syndrome](#) (HUS).

VDH has received numerous reports of GI illness, mainly in children, with similar symptoms. Some hospitalizations have been reported. Clinical evaluation and treatment of patients is ongoing. All potential causes of illness, including lake water and food exposures, are being investigated.

“We hope that those hospitalized continue to recover and can return home to their families soon,” said Rappahannock Health District Health Director Olugbenga O. Obasanjo, MD. “This is an ongoing investigation with the health department, and we will likely continue to learn about the situation in the coming days.”

While all the ill people confirm swimming or other water exposures in Lake Anna, VDH does not have enough information, at this time, to confirm that exposure to the lake, or any specific portion of the lake, is the cause of the illnesses. Water testing of the lake to evaluate present concentrations of bacteria, and to determine whether a public health risk may be ongoing, is being conducted.

The illnesses are not suspected as [Harmful Algal Bloom](#) (HAB) related, as this pathogen is not associated with HABs. Currently there is no on-going HAB event; however, there

are indications of algae activity, which are typical for this time of year. A HAB Status update for Lake Anna will be available at the link above, the week of June 10.

Because the investigation is ongoing, VDH does not have enough information to support a swimming advisory; however, it does encourage caution when swimming.

“As we head to pools, lakes, and beaches to enjoy the warmer weather and spend time with our families, it is important to remember to take precautions to prevent illness,” Dr. Obasanjo said. “Showering before and after swimming, washing your hands before eating, and being sure not to drink the lake water are some of the ways to stay healthy this summer. It is also important not to swim if you have diarrhea. Children may need extra monitoring and reminders to follow these precautions.”

Germs in water can cause minor illnesses (rashes, diarrhea) or more serious illnesses that last longer than vacation!

To prevent illness when swimming and boating in natural waters, people should:

- Never drink untreated water, and don't swim if skin has cuts or open wounds. Natural waters such as rivers, lakes, and oceans contain germs and contaminants, which can cause illness.
- Wash their hands after using the bathroom and before preparing and eating food.
- Avoid swimming near storm drains (pipes that drain polluted water from streets) along into natural waters.
- Avoid swimming if they are vomiting or have diarrhea.
- Not go in water if there is a green film on the water and keep pets out as well. This film may indicate an algal bloom and some algae produce toxins that can make people sick.
- Shower or bathe after swimming to wash off possible germs and contaminants.
- Avoid swimming for three days after a heavy rain. Germs can come from overflowing sewage, polluted storm water & runoff from land.
- Properly dispose of human waste by discharging boat sewage at marinas with a pump-out unit or dump station.

If you were in the Lake Anna area on Memorial Day weekend or since and experienced gastrointestinal illness (such as stomach cramps and diarrhea), please contact your [local health department](#) and seek medical care if you are still experiencing symptoms.

VDH will provide updates as more information becomes available. To protect patient privacy, further details on ill individuals will not be shared.