

Water Warning: Algae too high to swim in Caloosahatchee River

Jun 09, 2011 4:42 PM EDT FOX-4

By Colleen Hogan, Reporter / Videojournalist

An algae infestation in the Caloosahatchee river will affect your plans on the water and possibly your health!

Four In Your Corner's Colleen Hogan breaks down what you need to know to keep your family safe.

An algae bloom in the Caloosahatchee River is to blame, affecting the entire river basin right now and the stuff can make you sick. So you want to keep out until the situation clears up.

It's green, it's gross, and it can make you sick.

"We don't want people swimming, we don't want pets in the water and we don't want people allowing their livestock to drink out of the river," Lee Co. Health Dept. spokesperson Diane Holm said.

The Lee Co. Health Department's putting up signs in some areas, warning people to stay out.

"There is a warning in effect for the Caloosahatchee River Basin," Holm said.

Portions of the river are filled with blue-green algae, which produces a toxic substance that can cause some serious health problems. One mom didn't know about it until she saw the signs and her kids weren't too happy to hear the news.

"They were asking, why can't we swim?" mom Tina Schneider said. "Why didn't you tell us? And we were like, we didn't know until we got here."

So when's it gonna be safe for you and your family to get back in the water? I took that question to the health department but the answer isn't clear.

They'll have to keep testing the water until the levels are safe to swim again. In the meantime, Holm says don't go in, and don't eat any fish from the river from areas where fish are dead or floating.

"This isn't necessarily going to go away quickly," Holm said.

Holm says rain will help flush dead algae down the river and clear it out eventually. The bacteria can cause respiratory issues, skin irritations and nausea.

We'll stay on top of this public health situation and let you know when it's safe again to swim.