

## **Use caution near portions of Caloosahatchee River**

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FORT MYERS, Fla.-The Lee County Health Department recommends the public use caution before exposing themselves, pets or livestock to the Caloosahatchee River water area between the Broadway Street (Alva Bridge) and the locks for at least the next week.

A toxin produced by Cyanobacteria or blue-green algae, that can harm fish, animals and people when swallowed has shown up in tests, said Chuck Walther, director of Environmental Engineering.

It is also known to reduce oxygen levels as the bacterium decomposes, resulting in fish kills.

"At this time the Lee County Health Department has not received any information that the toxins in the river have reached harmful levels," Walther said. "We are expecting analyses to be ready within the next week or so."

Because test results can take weeks to show toxicity, the Health Department is recommending residents and visitors avoid eating fish from the river, if dead fish are floating on the surface, in addition to avoiding ingestion of river water. The river will be posted with warning signs.

The findings come just in time for some river-goers.

15-year-old Shane Connors and his mother came to the Franklin Lock and Dam Tuesday evening to fish. Connors says he probably would not have thought twice before going in the water.

"I would have if you didn't tell me about the algae," Connors says.

For Cezary Cichowski, who frequently fishes the river, his routine will continue, only with a little more care.

"I'm going to catch and release and don't go into the water," Cichowski says.

The World Health Organization reports humans are affected with a range of symptoms including skin irritation, stomach cramps, vomiting, nausea, diarrhea, fever, sore throat, headache, muscle and joint pain, blisters of the mouth and liver damage. Swimmers in water containing cyanobacterial toxins may suffer allergic reactions, such as asthma, eye irritation, rashes, and blisters around the mouth and nose. The toxins can also affect the kidneys.

For more information contact the Lee County Health Department at (239) 274-2204.