

# Recent tests keep beaches at lake closed

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Beaches and swimming areas at Lake O' the Pines will remain off limits during the coming weekend after test samples taken Monday revealed excessive bacteria levels.

All seven designated swimming areas at the Northeast Texas reservoir have been closed since June 18 after routine testing showed unhealthy levels of E. coli bacteria. Those areas were re-tested this past week, and results were back Thursday.

"The results are still high, and we're going to keep the beaches closed," Reservoir Manager Bobby Hamrick said. "We have re-tested (again), and should get those results back on Monday."

This latest round of testing took samples from inside and out of the swimming areas.

"We're having different folks do our sampling today," Hamrick said Thursday. "They tested around our swimming beaches and out around the boat ramps, too."

He said the samples were taken from outside the buoy-enclosed swimming areas to give regulators something to compare with the samples inside the swimming area.

"We've had high (bacteria) counts before, but never to the extent that we have now," he said.

No illnesses have been reported as a result of the pollution, which Hamrick and other officials credit to the heavy rains about two weeks ago. The runoff from those showers washed bacteria found in animal waste throughout the region into the lake.

"It is better than the last time that we took samples, on the 14th," he said.

The elevated bacteria levels do not affect water supplies for Longview and other cities that drink treated Lake O' the Pines water, the manager of that treatment and distribution system said.

Walt Sears, manager of the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District, added the bacteria found at the lake are not the same strand of E. coli associated with spoiled meat or produce.

"That's not even the strand of E. coli that we're talking about when we say, 'E. coli tests were performed,'" Sears said. "There's a good E. coli and bad E. coli. It's in our body."

Hamrick and others stressed boating, fishing and other activities on the lake are not affected by the ban on the swimming areas. The health standard for those enclosed areas is different because people are more likely to swallow water there, Hamrick said.

Those areas are Sandy Beach and Long Beach, Brushy Creek, Alley Creek and Johnson Creek campgrounds, and day use areas at Shady Grove and Johnson Creek.

Hamrick said another round of samples will be taken Monday regardless of the results from Thursday's samples.

"We've got the Fourth of July coming," he said. "And we've got the rest of the summer that we'll be testing."