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Elevated Levels of Enterococci Bacteria Found at North Kenai Beach

(Anchorage, Alaska) – Recent water quality samples collected at North Kenai Beach indicate elevated levels of enterococci bacteria in the water. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is collecting the samples this summer to determine if the water is safe for recreation.

Contact with water that has high levels of enterococci may cause people to have stomach aches, diarrhea, or ear, eye and skin infections.

DEC suggests that beach users take normal precautions to avoid exposure, such as avoiding drinking or swimming in the water; washing after contact with the water, and rinsing fish harvested from the area with clean water. As always, people should cook seafood to a minimum of 145 degrees Fahrenheit internal temperature to destroy pathogens.

North Kenai Beach is located at the end of Spruce Street in the City of Kenai. Water quality samples were collected July 8-11. DEC continues to monitor water quality. If bacteria levels increase significantly, the City of Kenai may post advisory signs at the beach until additional sampling indicates that enterococci bacteria numbers have dropped to safe levels.

Enterococci bacteria can come from any warm blooded animal including birds, seals, and humans. The reason for the currently elevated levels is unknown. The city has installed portable restrooms in areas of high beach use to control human waste. The nearby Kenai Sewage Treatment facility is not a contributing factor since it operates consistently within stringent permit limits.

The beach sampling program is being funded and implemented by DEC with cooperation of the City of Kenai. It is part of a nationwide effort to decrease the incidence of water-borne illness at public beaches under the federal BEACH Act.