

MEDIA ADVISORY

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ADVISORY: Concerns about bacteria or waterborne illnesses

Hurricane Debby caused the Ogeechee River and tributaries to flood a number of nearby areas. The extreme amount of water washed over streets, yards, and cars. It damaged homes and buildings. It overwhelmed septic systems and stormwater pump stations. As the water receded, it took the residue of all it touched with it. Oil and gasoline, debris, untreated wastewater, and fertilizer, for example, all washed into the river and eventually out to the ocean.

We have had a number of inquiries about the safety of swimming in the river or the sounds, or eating the seafood from those areas. Ogeechee Riverkeeper (ORK) does not issue “swim” advisories but shares the information of those that conduct those tests and maintains that data. **ORK recommends the public follow the guidelines provided by the leading agencies. ORK is not an emergency response organization or a public health authority.**

- Georgia DNR maintains a map of “Georgia Healthy Beaches.” Be sure to click on the tested area for further information about the time it was tested.
<https://coastalgadnr.org/healthybeaches>. Georgia Healthy Beaches program, contact program manager Ed Zmarzly at edward.zmarzly@dnr.ga.gov or 912-264-7218.
- The Georgia Public Health Department issues beach advisories:
https://coastalhealthdistrict.org/programs-services/environmental-health-2/beach_water_testing/. Their phone number is (912) 262-2300.
- Post-flood guidelines: <https://coastalhealthdistrict.org/after-flood/>
- Physicians and health professionals are required by law ([OCGA 31-12-2](#)) to report patients with the conditions listed under [Notifiable Disease Reporting Requirements](#).
- About vibrio, a bacteria prevalent in coastal waters in warmer months:
<https://dph.georgia.gov/epidemiology/acute-disease-epidemiology/foodborne-and-waterborne-diseases/vibrio-including-cholera>
- For complaints, record requests, services, inspections, exams, or other locally-related questions:
<https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/environmental-health-county-phone-numbers/download>

ORK does water quality monitoring in various locations throughout the watershed, and tracks the levels of dissolved oxygen (DO), pH, conductivity, and certain bacteria, which can be indicators. If something is abnormal, it is reported to the proper agency. ORK will continue to test and follow up on those reports to see if the issue has been resolved.

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Recent Enterococcus tests by GA DNR Coastal Resources Division:

August 20, 2024: Ossabaw North was 44 CFU/100 mL

August 20, 2024: Ossabaw South was 2 CFU/100 mL

Sept 2, 2024: Skidaway was 37 CFU/100 mL

Each of these sampling sites came in with results in the acceptable bacterial level, below 70 colony forming units per 100 mL of water.
