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NEWS

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ODH ADOPTS SINGLE-SAMPLE TESTING OF OHIO BEACHES

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Bathing Beach Monitoring Program will adopt a new, single-sample method of testing Ohio beaches in 2006 that will result in more timely posting of warning signs if bacteria levels are elevated.

Since 1986, ODH has used a five-sample geometric mean to evaluate *E. coli* levels in beach water to help Ohioans protect themselves and their loved ones from contracting illness from swimming in recreational waters. This was in line with federal criteria established at the time.

Since that time; however, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has developed a system to afford a greater level of protection on beaches where most people congregate. Based on the single, most recent sample collected, ODH will recommend warning signs be posted if *E. coli* levels exceed 235 colony forming units (cfu) per 100 milliliters of beach water tested.

“This new sampling method will provide Ohio beachgoers with further protection against potential illness,” said ODH Director J. Nick Baird, M.D. “We hope all beachgoers have a safe, healthy summer.”

If *E. coli* bacteria levels exceed 235 cfu, ODH recommends the posting of signs to inform beachgoers of conditions that may make it unsafe for some to swim. The signs read: “Water Quality Advisory – Bacterial levels here currently exceed state standards. Children, the elderly and those in ill health are advised not to swim.”

Gastroenteritis is the most common illness associated with swimming in polluted water. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, cramps, fever, headache and diarrhea. Swimmers can reduce their chances of getting sick by steering clear of visible discharge pipes; keeping their head and face out of the water; not swallowing the water; showering after swimming; and waiting 24 hours after a heavy rainfall before swimming.

More information is available on the ODH Web site at:

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhPrograms/eh/bbeach/beachmon.aspx>. Sample results are also available during the sampling season – from Memorial Day through Labor Day – by calling toll-free 1-866-OHIO-BCH (644-6224).