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For Immediate Release

York Region begins 2011 Beach Sampling Program

Signs posted at local beaches identify if bacteria levels are too high for swimming

NEWMARKET – The Regional Municipality of York monitors water quality at 15 public bathing beaches in York Region throughout the summer months to ensure water quality is safe for swimming.

From mid June until the end of August, a minimum of five water samples are collected and tested weekly from various York Region beaches.

Permanent metal signs advising the public whether or not the water is safe for swimming are found at each of the beaches sampled by York Region. Below are pictures and explanations for the types of signs that may be posted:

<p>Blue Sign</p> <p>This sign indicates it is safe to swim in the water unless there has been a heavy rainfall within the last 48 hours. Bacteria levels in the water tend to increase after a heavy rainfall and may pose a risk to your health.</p>	
<p>Red sign</p> <p>This sign indicates the level of bacteria in the water is high enough to cause a greater risk of illness and may pose a risk to your health.</p> <p>High levels of bacteria can cause skin, ear, eye, nose and throat infections, as well as stomach disorders.</p> <p>York Region advises not to go into the water when you see this sign.</p>	

There are many factors that contribute to higher levels of bacteria in our beach water, including:

- Seasonal and storm surface run-off into rivers and lakes
- Agriculture manure and feedlot run-off
- Domestic pet waste run-off
- Sewer overflows and malfunctioning private sewage disposal systems
- Large population of waterfowl
- Warm water temperatures
- Boating waste

Below is a list of tips to help keep local beaches open and safe for swimming:

- Avoid attracting animals or birds to beaches by feeding them
- Avoid the water if you have an infection or open wound
- If you own a pet, please observe local "stoop and scoop" by-laws and remove their waste from municipal streets, public parks and private property
- Practice pollution-free boating by disposing of human wastes hygienically
- If planning an addition to your home, contact your local building department to ensure plumbing fixtures are properly connected to municipal sanitary sewer pipes or your private sewage disposal system
- Upgrade and keep your private sewage disposal system in good working order
- In agricultural communities, fence livestock away from streams and provide them with alternate water sources
- Ensure run-off from feedlots and manure piles is properly maintained

To find out if your favourite beach is safe for swimming or for more information about the Region's 2011 Beach Sampling Program, please contact, **York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca/beaches**

For more information on The Regional Municipality of York, please visit www.york.ca

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