

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Tuesday, February 7, 2023**



## **HEALTH OFFICIALS ISSUE RED TIDE ALERT FOR LEE COUNTY**

**Contact:**

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**Lee County, Fla.** – The Florida Department of Health in Lee County (DOH-Lee) has issued health alerts for the presence of a red tide bloom. An alert level of red tide was found near **Buck Key (Blind Pass), Gasparilla Island State Park (Boca Grande Pass), Tarpon Bay Road Beach (Sanibel), and Lighthouse Beach (Sanibel)**. This is in response to water samples taken on January 31, 2023 and February 1, 2023.

Residents and visitors are advised to take the following precautions:

- Look for informational signage posted at most beaches.
- Stay away from the water, and do not swim in waters with dead fish.
- Those with chronic respiratory problems should be especially cautious and stay away from this location as red tide can affect your breathing.
- Do not harvest or eat molluscan shellfish or distressed or dead fish from this location. If caught live and healthy, finfish are safe to eat as long as they are filleted and the guts are discarded. Rinse fillets with tap or bottled water.
- Wash your skin and clothing with soap and fresh water if you have had recent contact with red tide.
- Keep pets and livestock away and out of the water, sea foam and dead sea life. If your pet swims in waters with red tide, wash it as soon as possible.
- Residents living in beach areas are advised to close windows and run the air conditioner, making sure that the A/C filter is maintained according to manufacturer's specifications.
- If outdoors near an affected location, residents may choose to wear masks, especially if onshore winds are blowing.

A caution level of red tide was found near **Bonita Beach Park**. A cautionary notice indicates low levels (>10,000-100,000 *Karenia brevis* cells per liter) of red tide detected in sampling. This is in response to water samples taken on February 1, 2023.

The department encourages everyone to review these tips to stay safe while enjoying Florida's beaches:

- In Florida, red tide is caused by a naturally occurring microscopic alga called *Karenia brevis*. Red tide algal blooms can change rapidly, staying in one place for months or just a few days or weeks.

- Symptoms from breathing red tide usually include coughing, sneezing and watery eyes. For most people, symptoms are temporary and typically go away when the person leaves the area. Wearing a particle filter mask may lessen the effects, and over-the-counter antihistamines decrease symptoms.
- People with chronic respiratory problems, like asthma, should avoid areas with active red tides. People with symptoms that persist should seek medical attention.
- Pet owners are advised that red tide poses a risk to animals brought to the beach. Red tide can affect animals if they drink affected water, lick their wet paws or fur, or breath marine aerosols.
- Residents sensitive to red tide and living in beach areas affected by blooms are advised to close windows and run the air conditioner (making sure that the AC filter is maintained according to the manufacturer's specifications).
- Seafood, including shellfish, in restaurants, hotels, grocery stores, and markets is safe to eat. Cooked shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels) thoroughly to prevent exposure to *Vibrio vulnificus*. Shellfish should not be harvested or eaten from areas with active red tide.

Beachgoers are encouraged to check conditions before they go to the beach as conditions can change daily.

### **What is red tide?**

Red tide is one type of harmful algal bloom caused by high concentrations of the toxic dinoflagellate *Karenia brevis* (*K. brevis*), a type of microscopic algae found in the Gulf of Mexico. Red tide typically forms naturally offshore, commonly in late summer or early fall, and is carried into coastal waters by winds and currents. Once inshore, these opportunistic organisms can use nearshore nutrient sources to fuel their growth. Blooms typically last into winter or spring, but in some cases, can endure for more than one year.

### **Is it harmful?**

*Brevis* produces potent neurotoxins (brevetoxins) that can be harmful to the health of both wildlife and people. Wind and wave action can break open *K. brevis* cells and release toxins into the air. This is why you should monitor conditions and use caution when visiting affected water bodies. People in coastal areas can experience varying degrees of eye, nose and throat irritation during a red tide bloom. Some individuals with chronic respiratory conditions like asthma or chronic lung disease might experience more severe symptoms. Red tide toxins can also affect the central nervous system of fish and other marine life, which can lead to fish kills and increased wildlife strandings or mortalities. Eating contaminated seafood can cause neurotoxic shellfish poisoning in humans. Symptoms include nausea and vomiting; tingling of the mouth, lips and tongue; and slurred speech and dizziness.

**Find current information** about Florida's water quality status and public health notifications for harmful algal blooms and beach conditions by visiting [ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov](https://protectingflorida.together.gov) and [floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/aquatic-toxins](https://floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/aquatic-toxins). *Protecting Florida Together is the state's joint effort to provide statewide water quality information to prioritize environmental transparency and commitment to action.* **For local shellfish harvesting status, visit the [Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services](#).**

## **Where Can I Report Issues Related to Red Tide?**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission collects and analyzes red tide samples and results are updated multiple times daily ([MyFWC.com/redtidemap/](https://myfwc.com/redtidemap/)); status updates are issued twice weekly during blooms ([Red Tide Current Status](#)). To hear a recording about red tide conditions throughout the state, call the toll-free hotline at 866-300-9399.

To **report fish kills**, **contact** the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute via the FWC Reporter App, call 1-800-636-0511, or report [online](#) at <https://myfwc.com/research/saltwater/health/fish-kills-hotline/>.

**Report symptoms** from exposure to a harmful algal bloom or any aquatic toxin to the Florida Poison Information Center. Call 1-800-222-1222 to speak to a poison specialist immediately.

**Contact your veterinarian** if you believe your pet has become ill after consuming or having contact with red tide-affected water or contaminated marine life.

If you have other health questions or concerns about red tide blooms, please call DOH-Lee at 239-690-2100.

### **About the Florida Department of Health**

The Department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote, and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county, and community efforts.

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