

January 26, 2017

## HEALTH OFFICIALS CONFIRM WASTEWATER CONTAMINATION IN THE WITHLACOOCHEE AND SUWANNEE RIVERS

Health advisory issued for Hamilton, Madison and Suwannee Counties



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**Madison, Fla.** — The Florida Department of Health in Hamilton, Madison and Suwannee today issued a joint health advisory extending the previous advisory for the Withlacoochee River to include a portion of the Suwannee River. The health advisory is now in effect for residents and visitors on the Withlacoochee River and on a portion of the Suwannee River from the point where the two rivers meet, downstream along the border of Madison and Suwannee County to the Lafayette County line just above Dowling Park. The river waters are not safe for contact during recreational use at this time.

Test results from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection water sampling in the area have confirmed high levels of enteric bacteria possibly due to a large spill of untreated sewage reported by the City of Valdosta, Georgia.

People are urged to avoid contact with water in the Withlacoochee River and the impacted areas of the Suwannee River. Water contaminated with wastewater overflow presents several health risks to humans. Untreated human sewage with microbes can cause gastrointestinal issues, disease, infections or rashes.

Anyone who comes in contact with the river water should wash thoroughly, especially hands, and before eating and drinking. Children and older adults, as well as people with weakened immune systems, are particularly vulnerable to disease so every precaution should be taken to avoid contact with river water.

Additional sampling will take place to determine when the river water is safe for recreational use.

For more information about potential health effects of wastewater overflow, Floridians are encouraged to contact DOH-Hamilton at 386-792-1414, DOH-Madison at 850-973-5000 or DOH-Suwannee at 386-362-2708.

### **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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