

South Bass Island
Gastrointestinal Outbreak
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Version: Aug. 24, 2004
10:30 a.m.

How many people are sick?

- As of Aug. 24, 2004, the Ottawa County Health Department has identified 893 patients who are linked to this outbreak of gastrointestinal illness.
- Interviews are pending with 162 additional patients.
- Patients have been identified from 12 states and one Canadian province (Ontario). These cases involve illness in travelers to South Bass from out of town. The states are Ohio, California, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Florida, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, New York, Georgia and Texas; we are working with colleagues in these areas to identify and interview patients.
- No one has died that we are aware of.

When did the outbreak begin?

- A vast majority of patients report getting sick beginning the first week in August; however, interviews have determined a small number of illnesses dating to early June and reports continue to come in.

Where can I go for more information?

- The Ohio Department of Health has a toll-free information line. The number is 1-866-905-INFO (4636). The hours are 8 a.m.-7 p.m. weekdays.
- If that phone line rings busy, you may call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information line at 888-246-2675. The Spanish-language line is 888-246-2857. The TTY line is 866-874-2646.
- ODH's Web site will post information as it becomes available at: <http://www.odh.state.oh.us>.

Is South Bass Island or Put-In Bay closed? Are there any travel restrictions?

- We are in the early stages of our investigation and no common source has been determined; nothing has been ruled out. We are providing all available information so people can make the most informed decisions possible regarding their health. There are no travel restrictions to South Bass Island.

What's causing this?

- Nothing has been ruled out; however we have begun looking at water, wastewater and possible cross contamination issues as the first phase of the environmental assessment.
- There are 11 laboratory-confirmed cases of *Campylobacter*, one of the most common bacterial causes of diarrheal illness in the United States, one lab-confirmed case of *Salmonella* and three lab-confirmed cases of Norovirus, a common cause of viral gastroenteritis.

What are the symptoms?

- The majority of patients report symptoms including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and cramps. Fewer patients report fever, chills and muscle aches.

What if I have symptoms?

- Anyone with symptoms after visiting South Bass Island is asked to call the Ottawa County Health Department at 419-734-6800.

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Are these common illnesses?

- The Ottawa County Health Department has cast a wide net in this investigation, as the cause of illness is still undetermined. Reports of gastrointestinal illness are not uncommon in Ohio, in fact more than 1,300 cases of *Salmonella* and more than 1,200 cases of *Campylobacter* were reported to the Ohio Department of Health in 2003.

What can I do to protect myself?

- Because gastrointestinal illnesses are common in Ohio in the summer, the Ohio Department of Health and the Ottawa County Health Department offer these tips to help Ohioans protect their health: Wash hands thoroughly and frequently; when eating buffet-style, keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold; make sure all meats are cooked thoroughly; consider drinking bottled water.

Are there any other islands involved?

- The investigation is focused on South Bass Island at this time.

What do I do about my water well?

- Is it a private well (for a home)? Call the Ottawa County Health Department, 419-734-6800.
- Is it a public well (for a business)? Call the Ohio EPA Regional Office, 419-352-8461.

What's being done?

- A team of three epidemiologists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and staff from the Ohio Department of Health arrived in Ottawa County Friday, Aug. 20 to investigate the outbreak. Their goals are to identify the cause or causes of the illness, conduct an environmental assessment and establish recommendations to prevent and control the outbreak.
- The public health response team, which includes staff from the CDC, ODH and local health departments throughout Ohio, currently numbers nearly 30 people in Ottawa County. They are working diligently day and night to try and identify the source of the illnesses.
- The epidemiological investigation continues; the environmental portion of the investigation, which will include local health departments, ODH, the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio EPA and the CDC is underway. The first part of that environmental assessment includes surveys, inspections and sampling to evaluate the safety of water sources.

Who is involved in helping?

- ODH, several local health departments, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Ohio EPA, the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Department of Administrative Services and the Ohio Emergency Management Agency are assisting.

What can I do to help?

- At this time, there are no requests for volunteers from the public. We can take your name and phone number in case there is a need in the near future.