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Social Services | Public Health | Behavioral Health

news release

July 13, 2021

Drought raises public health concerns

On May 10, 2021, California Gov. Gavin Newsom expanded the drought emergency proclamation to 41 counties, including Humboldt. With this proclamation comes acknowledgement that droughts can cause changes to communities and the environment that impact public health.

Reduced stream flows increase the concentration of pollutants in water and cause stagnation and elevated water temperatures. While warmer waters can be comfortable to swim in, they can also increase the growth of some pathogens including *V. cholera*, *N. fowleri*, *Giardia*, *Cryptosporidium*, *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* and harmful algal blooms, leading to reduced oxygen levels that threaten fish and other aquatic life and can be harmful to animals and people. Lower water levels can also increase the risk of injury by jumping or diving. Before swimming in rivers, lakes or streams, follow these tips:

- Verify water is deep and clear of debris before diving
- Avoid swallowing river, lake or stream water or inhaling water spray while swimming
- Avoid wading and swimming in water containing algal blooms
- Shower after returning from a day on the water
- Seek medical attention immediately if you think that you, your pet or livestock might have been poisoned by harmful algal blooms. Be sure to tell the doctor about possible contact with harmful algae.
- Never drink, cook with or wash dishes with water from rivers, streams or lakes.

Many residents in Humboldt County rely on groundwater, springs and the region's many rivers and tributaries to meet their residential, agricultural and industrial water needs. With low precipitation and increased evaporation of surface water, groundwater supplies are not replenished at a reliable rate. As a result, drinking water supplied from private wells and surface water diversions may be at higher risk for drought-related infectious disease.

People who are elderly, very young or have a compromised immune system may be susceptible to waterborne disease(s). The Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services, Division of Environmental Health (DEH) recommends the following actions to maximize public health protections:

- Periodically check water supply lines and fixtures for leaks
- Periodically send drinking water samples to an accredited lab for bacteriological testing
- Implement additional water treatment measure to domestic drinking water supplies
- Implement water saving techniques (e.g. rainwater catchment, greywater diversion) to decrease water demand.

For more information, call DEH at 707-445-6215 or 800-963-9241.

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