



LOCAL

How do you prep for red tide? Manatee has a plan for possible impact on Anna Maria

BY RYAN BALLOGG

UPDATED JULY 23, 2021 02:31 PM





Red tide is a harmful algal bloom made up of an organism called *Karenia brevis* that can kill sea life. When red tide is present in Florida waters, water can appear brown-green and have the smell of dead fish. BY META VIERS | PATRICK GLEASON | SARA NEALEIGH



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Manatee County is preparing for the worst. Just in case.

County staff is monitoring for the possibility of severe impacts caused by red tide affecting both of Anna Maria Island's coastlines.

Red tide's effects have so far been mild in the island community. But officials have come to adopt a better-safe-than-sorry approach when it comes to the harmful algal bloom.

The red tide-causing algae *Karenia brevis* occurs naturally in the Gulf of Mexico but can be worsened by [nutrient pollution](#) near the shore. At its worst, red tide can cause massive fish kills, foul beach conditions, illness in humans and economic strife.

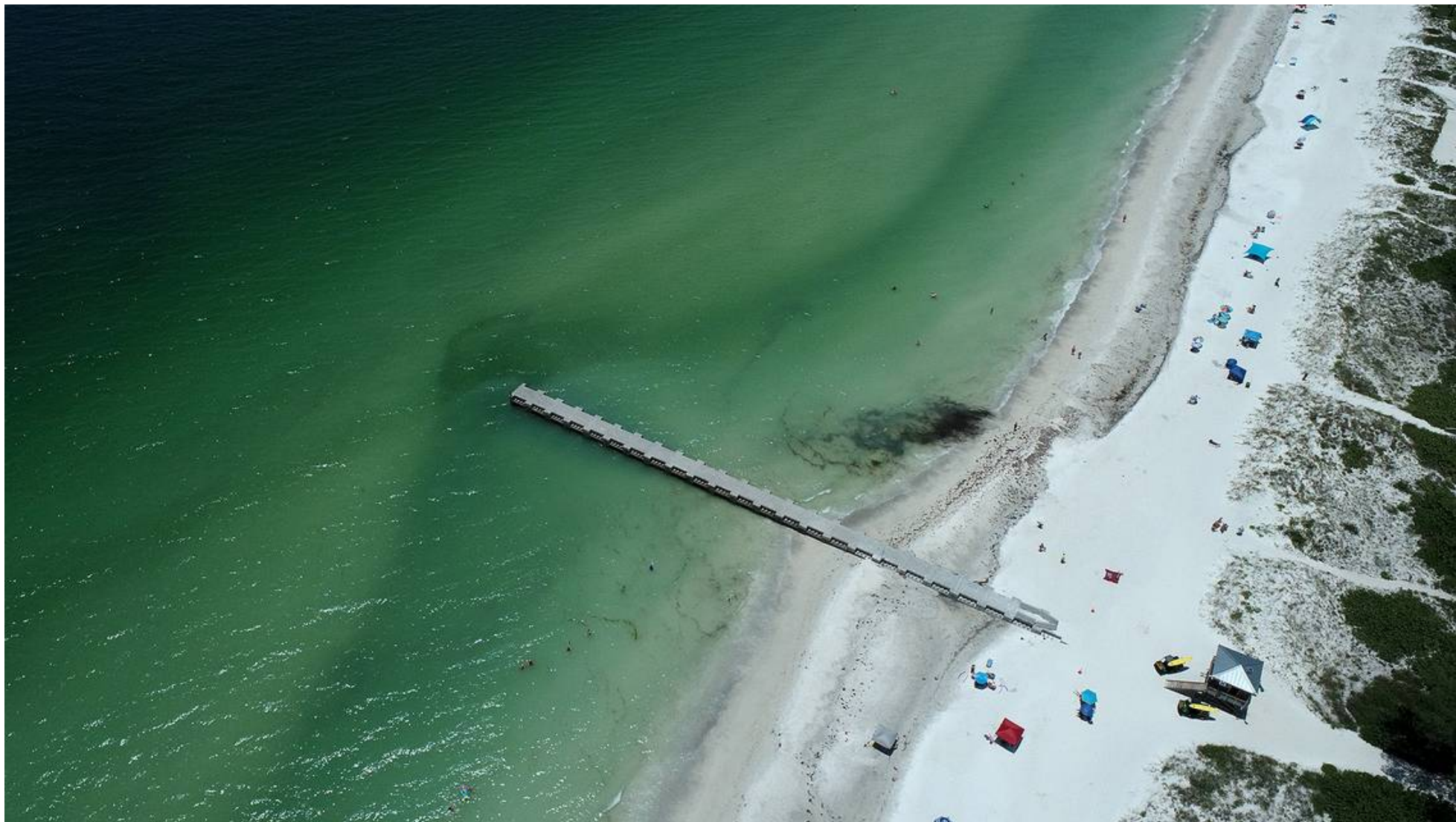
Red tide blooms have plagued stretches of Southwest Florida's coastline since December, but the algae only recently reached bloom concentrations around Anna Maria Island. Spotty fish kills and mild to moderate respiratory irritation have been reported over the past week on public beaches in Anna Maria, Holmes Beach and Bradenton Beach.

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07/21/21—As a red tide bloom impacts Anna Maria Island, Manatee County Government staff are monitoring by air, land and sea. Local impacts from the bloom have been mild so far but could get worse. Tiffany Tompkins TTOMPKINS@BRADENTON.COM

Conditions have been the worst near the southern end of the island, where high concentrations of red tide were first detected on July 12.

Shortly after, the county's Emergency Management Division began coordinating a response effort to monitor the blooms by air, land and sea.

Manatee County workers are using drones to monitor red tide impacts on Anna Maria Island's Gulf Coast beaches, according to interdepartmental reports obtained by the Bradenton Herald. Discolored water caused by the blooms can be spotted from above.

A skiff was also deployed on Tuesday into Sarasota Bay, Palma Sola Bay and Anna Maria Sound, where parks and natural resources staff checked for dead fish. The excursion found dead marine life in intracoastal waters from Longboat Key to Anna Maria, according to the county report, with the highest amounts near Longboat Key.

Roll-off dumpsters that can be used, if necessary, for the collection of dead fish have been placed near public beaches in all three Anna Maria Island cities. Two loaders are also at the ready at Coquina Beach, according to the county report.

The report notes that numerous fish kills and one sea turtle fatality have been documented by beach patrol and property management staff.

The county's Financial Management department will also seek \$500,000 in tourist tax funds to assist with red tide cleanup efforts at a county commission meeting next week, according to the report.

"Staff are reviewing plans for equipment purchase and contracting labor to supplement current county operations and working with (the Florida Department of Environmental Protection) to identify funding and reimbursement opportunities," the report states.



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However, Anna Maria Island has so far escaped some of the impacts being felt in coastal communities to the north and south.

“No widespread respiratory issues have been reported to this point as easterly winds have kept impacts mostly offshore, and no businesses have reported closures or

other economic impacts,” states the county’s latest report, which was issued on Wednesday.

Emergency officials were not available for comment on the red tide response efforts.

Environmental groups also remain alert for the bloom’s impacts and point to some signs that it may be worsening in Manatee County waters.



07/21/21—One of several dumpsters designated for dead fish is in the parking lot at the Manatee Public Beach, but only had a few beer cans in it. As a red tide bloom impacts Anna Maria Island, Manatee County Government staff are monitoring by air, land and sea. Local impacts from the bloom have been mild so far but could get worse. Tiffany Tompkins TTOMPKINS@BRADENTON.COM

“Red tide is definitely around, but it’s really spotty,” said Rusty Chinnis, a local fishing instructor, boat captain and board member of environmental group Suncoast

Waterkeeper. “Two days ago I went to the beach and couldn’t stay there because it was so strong.”

Chinnis noted that some waters are clear while pockets of red tide impact others.

“We’ve been seeing dead goliath grouper for weeks along Manatee County’s shoreline,” said David Tomasko, executive director of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program. “When you start killing goliath grouper, that means there’s red tide at the bottom of the bay.”

“The dead fish on Pinellas’ shoreline, that’s just the visible manifestation,” said Tomasko, referring to the [hundreds of tons](#) of marine life lost to red tide that have been collected near St. Petersburg.

Recent forecasts from the University of South Florida and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predict that elevated concentrations of red tide will continue to linger in Manatee County waters over the next several days. And more intense areas of the bloom are predicted to spread up and down the coastlines of Anna Maria Island, according to USF’s [latest models](#).

Late in the week, discolored water was visible offshore, but conditions remained pleasant at Cortez and Manatee beaches as crowds enjoyed the sand and sun. Dead fish were not in sight.

“We’ve got our fingers crossed,” Chinnis said of the bloom. “The most concerning part is that it’s so early. This is something we usually see in late August or September. The water is getting warmer and will continue to get warmer.”



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RED TIDE RESOURCES

Beach conditions: Residents and visitors can check Mote Marine Laboratory's beach conditions tracker for the latest conditions on public beaches around Southwest

Florida at [visitbeaches.org](https://www.visitbeaches.org).

Fish kills: Members of the public can report fish and other marine life kills to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at at 800-636-0511 or myfwc.com/research/saltwater/health/fish-kills-hotline.

Red tide safety: The Florida Department of Health offers the following safety tips for people who may encounter red tide:

- Do not swim around dead fish.
- If you have chronic respiratory problems, consider staying away from the beach as red tide can affect your breathing.
- Do not harvest or eat molluscan shellfish and distressed or dead fish. If fish are healthy, rinse fillets with tap or bottled water and throw out the guts.
- Keep pets and livestock away from water, sea foam and dead sea life.
- 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 the manufacturer's specifications).
- If outdoors, residents may choose to wear paper filter masks, especially if onshore winds are blowing.
- If red tide-induced symptoms do not subside, contact your health care provider for evaluation.

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07/21/21—Visitors enjoy the sun and water at Cortez Beach Thursday. As a red tide bloom impacts Anna Maria Island, Manatee County Government staff are monitoring by air, land and sea. Local impacts from the bloom have been mild so far but could get worse.
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Ryan Ballogg is a news reporter and features writer at the Bradenton Herald. Since joining the paper in 2018, he has received awards for features, art and environmental writing in the Florida Press Club’s Excellence in Journalism Competition. Ryan is a Florida native and graduated from University of South Florida St. Petersburg.

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