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HEALTH
DEPARTMENT
of Northwest Michigan

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Health Department pilots rapid water quality testing equipment for Northwest Michigan beaches

NORTHWEST MICHIGAN – The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is one of 11 agencies across the state that will be piloting a new rapid-testing method of water quality monitoring at swimming beaches. Using the new method, health officials hope to be able to respond quickly to rapidly-changing E.coli levels, rather than having to await test results for a day or more after samples are taken.

The new test method is known as qPCR, or Quantitative Polymerase Chain Reaction. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) awarded \$500,000 in qPCR testing equipment to participating local public health departments. The Health Department of Northwest Michigan received Federal funding of \$29,695 to monitor 31 Great Lakes public bathing beaches, and an additional \$20,540 from the Clean Michigan Initiative to use qPCR testing on 18 inland lakes beaches across Northwest Michigan.

“We’re excited to begin qPCR testing this month,” said Scott Kendzierski, Director of Environmental Health Services for the Health Department. “Our Northern Michigan Regional Laboratory in Gaylord was partially renovated to accommodate the new qPCR equipment, and we’ve added an intern with qPCR experience to assist with sample collection and testing.” Kendzierski added that the new method will enable the Health Department to improve public health and safety by providing same-day beach water quality information.

Traditional test methods involve culturing samples, and require at least a day for cultures to grow. “E.coli levels change quickly,” Kendzierski explained. “That’s why it’s important for our Health Department to pursue any and all avenues of getting reliable test results to the public as quickly as possible.”

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan’s Regional Laboratory will also provide qPCR testing services for neighboring public health departments serving Grand Traverse County, Benzie-Leelanau and Luce-Mackinac-Alger-Schoolcraft in the Upper Peninsula. To learn more about services provided by the Northern Michigan Regional Laboratory, contact the Health Department at (800) 432-4121.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties.

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