

EPA: Hurricane sediment might be dangerous

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Frequent contact with hurricane-produced flooding sediment should be avoided, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials in Washington warned Thursday.

EPA scientists say direct frequent contact with sediment containing petroleum hydrocarbons, fuel oils and E. coli at the levels detected in samples taken in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina might cause adverse health effects.

E. coli bacteria were detected in 11 of the New Orleans samples, which implies presence of fecal bacteria. While no standards exist for determining human health risks from E. coli in soil or sediment, the EPA said people should avoid contact with it.

For contact with the bacteria, scientists advise the removal of contaminated clothing and the use of soap and water to clean exposed areas.

If contact with fuel oil occurs, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recommends washing with soap and water, eye flushing and removal of contaminated clothing. Immediate medical attention should be sought if ingestion of fuel oil-contaminated items occurs.

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