

# Of 23 waterfront sites tested, only 8 had low bacteria levels

BY GENEVIEVE BOWEN

While water quality has slightly improved at the persistently polluted Park View kayak launch since last summer, ongoing testing shows significant bacteria levels remain.

Recent data released by the Surfrider Foundation, a non-profit environmental organization that partners with Miami-Dade County to monitor water quality at over 20 sites from Sunny Isles to Bill Baggs, revealed the Park View kayak launch in Miami Beach still has some of the most contaminated water in the area, with 73% of samples collected failing to meet the state health standards.

While this number is down from the foundation's 2022 Clean Water Report published in May 2023 when 85% of samples collected at Park View didn't meet health standards, the site still has uncomfortably high levels

of bacterial contamination.

The latest readings collected on June 20 show 1,296 enterococcus bacteria units in Park View waters. Based on water quality standards set by the Florida Department of Health, low bacteria is classified as 0-35 MPN/100mL, medium is 36-70 and high is anything over 70.

Enterococci bacteria are introduced to beach water in several ways, including stormwater runoff, animal waste and improperly maintained sewage systems. While the US Environmental Protection Agency says enterococci are typically not considered harmful to humans, their presence in the environment may indicate that other disease-causing agents such as viruses, bacteria and protozoa may be present.

The foundation's Blue Water Task Force, the largest volunteer-run beach water testing program in the country, routinely tests

several beaches and kayak launches around Miami.

Over the last 12 months, the task force found Morningside Park, Miami's Little River Pocket Park, Pelican Harbor and the Park View had the highest contamination levels and repeatedly failed to meet health standards.

Park View kayak launch was the worst, with only 20% of samples collected over the past year meeting standards.

Of the 23 waterfront locations in Miami monitored by the foundation, only eight reported low levels of bacteria when data was last recorded earlier this month.

Among those with low levels are Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park, Miami Beach at 21st, 35th and 53rd streets, South Pointe Park, Sunny Isles at 174th Street, North Shore Ocean Terrace at 73rd Street and Surfside Beach at 93rd Street.

Residents and visitors to Miami are facing the possibility of water quality concerns at the city's beaches which could impact their summer plans. The county is closely monitoring water quality and taking measures to address any issues.

The Miami-Dade County Health Department monitors water quality at public beaches every week. If tests indicate unacceptable bacteria levels, advisories are issued and posted online.

The county is taking several measures to address these concerns, including increasing public education, inspecting storm drains and other sources of pollution, and continually updating the online system to inform the public of water quality issues.

When planning summer activities, Miami residents and tourists can check the county's website for updated information on beach closures and water quality levels.

# New medicine approach guides Nicklaus cancer treatments

BY ABRAHAM GALVAN

Cancer treatment researchers have developed a medicine approach that targets cancer by combining genetic testing with a new way to test individual drugs on tumor samples.

This combined approach, developed by Florida International University (FIU) cancer researcher Dr. Diana Azzam, was used for the first time to guide the treatment of relapsed pediatric cancer patients at First Ascent Biomedical and Dr. Maggie Fader at the Helen & Jacob Shaham Cancer & Blood Disorders Institute at Nicklaus Children's Hospital.

With Dr. Azzam's lab research approach, a sample of cancer cells is taken from the patient and processed in the lab in a way that closely resembles how they would normally grow in the body. Then the cancer is exposed to more than 120 FDA-approved



Florida International University cancer researcher Dr. Diana Azzam with young patient from Nicklaus.

drugs, including both cancer and non-cancer drugs. These drugs also may be tested in various combinations recommended by the clinical team. Dr. Azzam said it resulted in 83% of the children

showing improvement.

"The results are exciting because cancer that comes back is much harder to treat. Seeing improvement in 83% of patients is incredibly promising," said

Dr. Azzam, who is an assistant professor of environmental health sciences at the FIU Robert Stempel College of Public Health. "This could be the way we turn cancer into a manage-

able disease."

With a \$2 million appropriation from the state, Dr. Azzam's lab is set to become the first federally certified large-scale lab dedicated to functional cancer drug testing in Florida, said Dr. Marcos Mestre, chief medical officer at Nicklaus.

About 2 million people are diagnosed with cancer in the US each year, according to the National Cancer Institute. Nearly 30% – more than 600,000 – are expected to die of the disease.

"At the Helen & Jacob Shaham Cancer & Blood Disorders Institute at Nicklaus Children's Hospital, we believe no child should have to leave home to get the care they need," Dr. Mestre said. "That is why we won't stop collaborating with organizations like FIU that share our commitment to making pediatric cancer treatment a priority for children and their families all across the state of Florida."

# Mount Sinai embraces AI-based tools

BY ABRAHAM GALVAN

As Artificial Intelligence continues to evolve and be more prominent in healthcare, Mount Sinai Medical Center has implemented AI-based tools and platforms to better serve its patients.

Striving to be at the forefront of medical technology, Mount Sinai has partnered with several tech companies and has introduced new AI tools that are changing the future of healthcare, said Gino R. Santorio, the medical center's CEO and president.

"From streamlining the documentation processes for various physicians to new Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) and Chronic Care Management (CCM), implementing innovative technologies across clinical specialties allows for increased optimization, better outcomes, and a more personal experience for patients," he said.

Mount Sinai has partnered with HealthSnap, a virtual care management platform, to offer new RPM and CCM. The partnership, which launched in March, is live at three Mount Sinai locations, with plans to expand to 13 South Florida locations by year-end.

The RPM and CCM programs are expected to support more than 4,000 patient lives by the end of this year, with plans to reach up to 10,000 patients living with chronic conditions over time, said Dr. Clifford Medina, the medical center's chief of general medicine.

"Mount Sinai Primary Care is committed to delivering care that is accessible, comprehensive, and evidence-based, with a patient-centric approach," he said. "HealthSnap's extensive clinical resources, innovative platform, and proven patient outcomes enable us to provide proactive chronic condition care at scale across our entire primary care patient population."

Mount Sinai's new and programs will support patients with hypertension, diabetes, congestive heart failure, COPD, asthma, obesity and osteoporosis.

Mount Sinai has also implemented AI software designed to support the treatment of patients with complex aortic disease with the help of Cydar Medical and Medtronic. This software employs state-of-the-art minimally invasive endovascular technology that is being used by surgeons at Mount Sinai's Aortic Center.

Cydar generates a 3-D map of the patient's vascular system as well as supporting and integrating preoperative planning, intraoperative guidance, and postoperative reviews of endovascular surgery. The platform also utilizes AI to update the map throughout the patient's journey.

"The thing we are most excited about in the Aortic Center is our incorporation of an AI image-based guidance program that allows us to decrease radiation use on patients and decrease contrast or dye usage, which decreases the risk of problems with kidney function after these procedures, and allows us to perform these procedures in a more expedient manner," said Dr. Michael Ayad, co-director of the Aortic Center.

Mount Sinai's labor and delivery unit has incorporated PeriGen, a system that uses AI to analyze each patient's vital statistics and data constantly. With PeriGen, physicians, nurses, and other allied health professionals receive a visual indication of the patient's current and previous conditions, allowing clinicians to focus on patient care instead of chart documentation, said Dr. Alon Weizer,



Mount Sinai has joined with several tech companies using AI tools.

the medical center's chief medical officer. AI is also used to streamline note-taking processes for various physicians. Service lines like internal medicine are utilizing Abridge within Epic, cutting time spent documenting and increasing time spent with patients.

"Mount Sinai's dedication to implementing innovative technologies across clinical specialties and

in operations allows for increased optimization, better outcomes and a more personal experience for patients," Mr. Weizer added. "AI can be used to perform a variety of time-consuming tasks, freeing physicians to spend more time with their patients and on evaluating and managing more complex conditions that AI is not currently capable of addressing."