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## Do not eat fish from the lagoon

By Charles Hakwa  
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Fishing activities are discouraged

**Last week the chiefs of Erakor** village lifted the customary ban on fishing within the Emten and Ekasuvat Lagoons for only a month.

This has been met by a lot of excitement from residents of Second Lagoon, Club Hippique, Erakor Bridge, Tassariki, Seaside, Nambatu and Nambatri including Erakor village itself.

Since the kids are now on holiday and school is over, the lagoon is packed with them every day, fishing with lines, diving with spear guns and even casting nets. The 'kokias' shells, a local delicacy, are being collected and crabs too are also being hunted.

This seems like a lot of fun but we all should be asking ourselves, is whether this is safe.

Director of the Department of Environmental Health, Nelly Ham, says since recently, there was a fault in the Vila Central Hospital Sewage plant, E. Coli was found in high concentration in the lagoons.

With this high count she says this shows the presence of faeces (sisit) which could come from both humans and animals.

Director Ham is advising everyone living along the lagoons not to swim or go fishing. Usually when kids go swimming, they often like to swallow sea water and spit it out for fun.

She says if the sea water is swallowed, whoever swallows it can get painful stomach aches and diarrhea, continuous diarrhea may cause children to be malnourished in future, for some it may happen quickly while for others it may take time, long term effects include damage to the small intestines. For those who swim every day, skin rash may form on their bodies.

Since kids are the ones who swim the most, they are more at risk as their immune systems are not fully developed and not strong enough to fight off the bacteria. Another long-term effect on kids who continuously swim in the lagoon is stunting.

Stunting causes kids to not grow well as they are meant to be, and this usually makes them shorter in future. According to Director Ham, stunting also causes slow development of the brain which will result in slow learning for the children who swim in this polluted lagoon. Ham also speaks against washing of napkins in the lagoon as she says this is also a major contributor to pollution.

She says eating the fish, shells and crabs in the lagoon will also have the same effects as swimming in it as the fish have already been affected by the E. coli bacteria.

But she says the infamous sewage plant of the Vila Central Hospital which leaked into the lagoon is currently being repaired. However, she explains that after it is repaired it will take a longtime for things to get back to normal as the fish will also need to detox themselves which does not happen overnight.

Ham says they can only advice and they can not arrest anyone going against the advice; however, it is up to parents to be responsible for their own children's health as if one of them becomes sick, it is there own problem and nobody else's.

Ada Sokatch, a research officer from the Department of Fisheries, also advices against fishing in the lagoon and says anyone who does so, does so at their own risk.

Director of the Department of Water Services, Erie Sami says nobody should swim in the lagoon as the pollution from the sewage has drastic effects already explained by the Director of Environmental Health, Nelly Ham.