

# Health and Safety

## Three Topics of Importance to residents in the Greater Estero Area



# HEALTH AND SAFETY

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## Introduction

The ECCL is pleased to provide the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter's Greater Estero Community Report (GECR) for 2022. The ECCL's mission is "to advocate for meaningful change that maintains and improves the high quality of life in the greater Estero area through consensus-based advocacy, fact-based research, and relationships with community and civic decision-makers." To that end, we focus on the concerns expressed by residents in the greater Estero area.

During the last few years, greater Estero has seen a considerable increase in our local population. Younger families are moving to the area encouraged by the fabulous lifestyle available, the excellence of our healthcare and local schools, efforts to protect our environment, and the growth in the Arts and recreation facilities. These efforts will continue over the next 5 to 10 years.

We know there is a need to engage with long-time and younger residents. Our report this month addresses several issues that should be of interest to all residents covering Safety, The Environment/ Water Quality, and Health. These are three of the ECCL's five key areas that form the basis of our advocacy, the other two being Education and The Arts and Recreation.



- **Safety.**
  - The dangers of Cane Toads to our pets and young children
- **Health.**
  - Mental Distress in Children During COVID-19: Signs, Symptoms & What We Can Do to Help Our Kids & Ourselves
- **Environment/Water Quality**
  - How residents can help to improve our water quality in greater Estero

Thank you for your continued investment in supporting our efforts on your behalf.

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# THE DANGERS OF CANE TOADS TO PETS AND YOUNG CHILDREN & A POSSIBLE SOLUTION!

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*Prepared by Allan Bowditch, ECCL's Chief Communications Officer*

The Cane Toad or "Bufo" Toad is a poisonous amphibian that, when provoked, can produce a milky white toxin on its back. If a young child touched the toad and rubbed their eyes or sucked their fingers, they could become seriously ill and require medical treatment. The toxin is particularly dangerous to house pets. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, the toxin could leave a dog or cat in severe distress or dead in as little as 15 minutes. The Cane Toad also kills lizards and snakes and thus can seriously upset the ecosystem!



According to the University of Florida, Cane Toads have warty skin and are tan to reddish-brown, dark brown, or gray, with dark spots on their back. They have large, triangular parotoid glands on their shoulders that secrete the milky toxin. Unlike native southern toads, cane toads do not have ridges or "crests" on top of the head. They usually measure around 4-6 inches, sometimes growing to 9½ inches.

While present year-round, the Cane Toad spawning season is nearly upon us, and with their population poised to increase, it is crucial to keep your pets on a leash outdoors. Remember, not all

toads are foul, and sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish between a native Southern Toad and the invasive Cane Toad. If you need help with toad identification, snap a photo of the head & side profile and email it to [Toads@trekspetwasteremoval.com](mailto:Toads@trekspetwasteremoval.com).

The Cane Toad was first introduced into Florida to control agricultural pests in sugar cane in the 1930s and 40s. Current populations are likely the result of escapes and releases by importers in the 1950s and 60s. The creatures breed after periods of rainy weather, according to Toad Busters, a south Florida company specializing in the removal of dangerous toads. The rainy season lasts through the summer.

The female Cane Toad can lay more than 20,000 eggs in the March to November mating season. While less than 10% become toadlets, those that do survive can be a significant nuisance to pet owners and natural wildlife.

If a dog bites or encounters a cane toad, use a damp cloth or towel, and wipe the inside of the dog's mouth to ensure no toxins were swallowed. Do not flush the dog's mouth with a hose. It could send toxins down the animal's throat.

Take dogs to a veterinarian as soon as possible to treat symptoms such as seizures, heart problems such as arrhythmia, and body temperatures that skyrocket, then plunge. Symptoms of poisoning in pets include excessive drooling and extremely red gums, headshaking, crying, loss of coordination, and sometimes convulsions. Pick up dog droppings as cane toads are attracted to proteins in the droppings<sup>1</sup>.



## Controls Available

The control of Cane Toads is a challenge because of their widespread distribution, large population numbers, high breeding capacity, and burrowing behavior. Years of investigation into potential biocontrol agents have not yet been successful, and currently, there is no effective option for broad-scale reduction of toad populations.

There has been considerable research on reducing Cane Toad populations in Australia, where they are also widespread. In 2021, one Australian company Pestat developed a spray to euthanize the toad. The lemon-scented spray, called HopStop®, sold for just under \$20AU and took almost two years of chemical testing to reach the retail market<sup>2</sup>. "Its active ingredient, chloro-xylene, is already used in personal care products." HopStop® was made available on the market in Australia in 2013. Unfortunately, it never received approval for use in the U.S., and it is unlikely it will ever be released here.

Some firms in Southwest Florida either hand harvest or trap the Cane Toads to reduce their numbers, but eradication is not possible. "Perimeter" products can work to redirect toads away from areas of the garden, or specific locations are available and are itemized at the end of the article.

However, many experts have stated that management needs to focus on frontline surveys and remove toads in the short term. Removal involves the intensive collection of toads by hand, sometimes aided by traps and barrier/deflection fencing. Another recent Australian initiative aims to capture the Cane Toad tadpoles by mimicking the scent of the eggs of other toads, which

### Products available in the USA

PEST RID GRANULES and PEST RID SPRAY. When used together, these two products can help to keep cane toads away from the treated area.

Remove the insects and feed source of the Cane Toad. Use a pesticide like Bifen LP granules on your lawns.

In addition, it is worth adding Reclaim IT, a liquid concentrate also designed to eliminate the food source of cane toads. For more details, you can watch the short YouTube film here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h48gtHvbNSs>

are then lured into a container and later euthanized. This process appears to be gaining some success there.

### But there may be hope!

Stephen Fuchs, a veteran and student is enrolled in the FGCU Entrepreneurship School's Runway Program, has examined many of the developments tried in Australia. He believes he has developed an improved procedure for removing Cane Toads. He has developed two different trap system models. A battery-powered Treks Adult Trap is designed to lure and catch the larger Cane Toad, and a less expensive Treks Passive Trap model is intended to capture tadpoles.



He has designed experiments to conduct tests in nearby waterways to prove or disprove the effectiveness of the active and passive traps he has designed to lure and trap the adults and toadlets in the water.

As ECCL's representative to the School's Advisory Board, Jim Shields, a member of the ECCL's Board of Directors, was asked to meet with Mr. Fuchs to discuss the value and effectiveness of the product design. Terry Flanagan, who also works within the ECCL and is an entrepreneurial champion who helps students with new and exciting initiatives, is helping to design the trial protocol that will evaluate how the new process achieves its desired goals.

Hopefully, if that occurs, a more extensive trial will be conducted.

The ECCL is focused on safety issues in the greater Estero area and applauds the initiative that Mr. Fuchs is undertaking. We wish him well and encourage gated communities or organizations such as the CDD to learn more about Mr. Fuchs and the FGCU Entrepreneurial School's initiative to assess the value of the project. Don't hesitate to contact Terry Flanagan by email in the first instance about this project if you have any questions or offers of help. [BFlanagan@smartdecisionllc.com](mailto:BFlanagan@smartdecisionllc.com)

## Other Tips

- **Cover or bring in pet food** at night as it attracts cane toads
- **Remove standing water.** Toads need access to water every two days to rehydrate
- **Remove rubbish** and other debris so cane toads cannot shelter under it during the day
- **Keep your outside lights off when not needed.** Cane toads like nighttime lighting because it attracts moths and other insects for them to feast on.
- **Keep toads out by creating a barrier.** Cane toads are not good climbers and poor jumpers. Use a barrier made of a smooth solid material, which is at least 50cm high and secured into the ground to keep cane toads out of your yard.

## References

1 Florida tells residents to humanely kill these invasive, toxic toads that are lethal to pets, Jay Cannon and Maureen Kenyon USA TODAY NETWORK July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/06/11/cane-toads-bufo-toads-continue-spread-florida-what-know/5342297002/>

2 Testing a Euthanasia Spray for Control of Invasive Frogs. A collaborative effort was undertaken in Australia: Dr. Johnson and Monica McGarrity worked with Dr. David Dall and his Australian company, Pestat Pty. Ltd.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/spray-will-make-cane-toads-croak-20110221-1b2oa.html>



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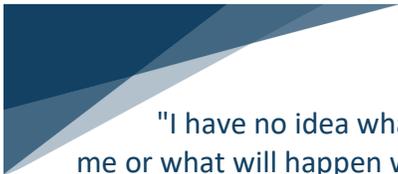
## MENTAL DISTRESS IN CHILDREN DURING COVID-19: SIGNS, SYMPTOMS & WHAT WE CAN DO TO HELP OUR KIDS & OURSELVES.

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***Paul G. Simeone, Ph.D., M.A. V.P., Medical Director of Behavioral Health – Lee Health  
Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine, F.S.U. College of Medicine***

The ECCL is grateful to Dr. Simeone for highlighting an issue causing many families considerable concern. It is reported that anxiety, depression, and eating disorders have doubled since the start of the COVID pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Children have suffered psychologically from being isolated from their friends and teachers during the critical years of their schooling.

Worries about how the situation will affect their annual assessments, school disruptions, stress about their ability to qualify for a university place, missed milestones, concerns about the family's financial situation have all taken their toll. It is essential to appreciate that families who have children experiencing these symptoms are not



"I have no idea what's awaiting me or what will happen when this all ends. For the moment, I know this: there are sick people, and they need curing."

— Albert Camus, *The Plague*

alone. Identifying the symptoms and knowing what to do will help reduce the stress parents experience when coping with these circumstances.

### A view from the frontlines

Let us begin by acknowledging one universal truth: The last two years have been horrible, horrifying, and haunting. Over six million are dead worldwide, nearly a million in our own country, and unprecedented disruption, suffering, and loss.

The scale of this catastrophe is mind-numbing. In 2019, the last full year we enjoyed before COVID hit, things were already not well. Roughly 46,000 children in SWFL suffered from a diagnosable Behavioral Health condition, primarily depression and anxiety, with fully 63% of them receiving no treatment. There has been a severe shortage of behavioral health practitioners in our region. As if that were not enough, there's much more.

Children suffering from behavioral health conditions often must wait several years to receive appropriate treatment in recent years. This situation was completely unacceptable. However, as pointed out later in this article, there have been significant steps taken recently to address this worrying timeline, even though more progress is still needed.

But the worst statistic of all is suicide. Suicide was and still is the second leading cause of death in children ages 10 to early adults aged 24, a heart-breaking scenario.

Eating disorders are another concern amongst children and adolescents. According to the study that appears in a pre-publication of Pediatrics at Michigan Medicine Center, the number of hospital



admissions among adolescents with eating disorders more than doubled during the first 12 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. New research suggests that the number of adolescents hospitalized for severe illness from eating disorders has also increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic 2.

"These findings emphasize how profoundly the pandemic has affected young people, who experienced school closures, canceled extracurricular activities, and social isolation. Their entire worlds were turned upside down overnight," said lead author Alana Otto, M.D., M.P.H., an adolescent medicine physician at the University of Michigan Health C.S. Mott Children's Hospital.

Restrictive eating disorders include anorexia nervosa and may be marked by dietary restriction, excessive exercise, and purging to lose weight. Genetics, psychological factors, and social influences have all been linked to developing eating disorders, and

adolescents with low self-esteem or depressive symptoms are at exceptionally high risk. Changes to adolescents' day-to-day lives during the pandemic, such as school closures and cancellation of organized sports, may also disrupt routines related to eating and exercise and be an impetus for developing unhealthy eating behaviors among those already at risk; Otto said.

Since 2020 things have become measurably worse, particularly for children. Not only have the adverse impacts of COVID - isolation, academic and social displacement, fear, and unparalleled stress at home - taken

their toll, but there have been other factors that have raised the level of ambient anxiety ("dread," to quote Kierkegaard) in our society. The aggregated effects of civic unrest, social division, and worsening climate anxiety (*terra firma* is no longer *firma*) have left us more alienated from one another than in decades. Finally, and certainly not least, the negative impact of social media on developing children adds immeasurably to our problems.

Sadly, these conditions have been worsening for several years and will doubtless continue in the foreseeable future.

What can we do about it?

### **The Importance of Building Resilience**

Why is resilience important in the context of mental health? Resilience is important because it gives people the strength to process and overcome hardship. Resilient people tap into their strengths and support systems to overcome challenges and work through problems. Those who lack resilience become easily overwhelmed and may turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms.

The more resilience someone has, the better they are at getting through tough times and the better their chances of recovering from the experiences of adversity and trauma. Being resilient doesn't mean that a person won't experience difficulty or distress. While some factors make specific individuals more resilient than others, there is good news: Resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that anyone can develop, making it ordinary rather than extraordinary. Like building a muscle, increasing your resilience takes time, practice, and intentionality.



The Mayo Clinic offers the following tips on how to improve your resilience<sup>3</sup>.

- Get connected. Building strong, positive relationships with loved ones and friends can provide you with support and acceptance in good and bad times. Establish other meaningful connections by volunteering or joining a faith or spiritual community.
- Make every day meaningful. Do something that gives you a sense of accomplishment and purpose every day. Set goals to help you look toward the future with meaning.
- Learn from experience. Think of how you've coped with hardships in the past. Consider the skills and strategies that helped you through difficult times.
- Remain hopeful. You can't change the past, but you can always look toward the future. Accepting and even anticipating change makes it easier to adapt and view new challenges with less anxiety.
- Take care of yourself. Tend to your own needs and feelings. Participate in activities and hobbies you enjoy. Include physical activity in your daily routine. Get plenty of sleep. Eat a healthy diet. Practice stress management and relaxation techniques, such as yoga, meditation, guided imagery, deep breathing, or prayer.
- Be proactive. Don't ignore your problems. Instead, figure out what needs to be done, make a plan, and take action. Although it can take time to recover from a significant setback, traumatic event, or loss, know that your situation can improve if you work at it.
- Focusing on several vital components can empower you and your child to withstand and learn from difficult and traumatic experiences.

What are the identifying symptoms and behavior you should look out for?

### **The importance of early identification**

For all of the complicated and painful things we have endured, the good news is that there is plenty we can do to make things better. Children have had the roughest ride in the last two



years and need our continued support. As adults, we need to pay particular attention to their thinking, feeling, and behavior. As a parent, teacher, or loved one, ask questions if you notice changes in how children typically behave daily. Everyone has a bad day from time to time, but if you notice changes in mood, anxiety, social isolation, eating, and sleeping as a trend, don't hesitate to intervene. Intervention is especially appropriate if you suspect any thoughts of self-harm or suicide. Most people are reluctant to ask about this for fear that it will worsen things. Nothing can be further from the truth. Your inquiries signal both love and interest in your child and the courage and capacity to address whatever needs to be done. In a YouTube interview Dr Phil explains how a parent should introduce the topic into the conversation with a child or adolescent to draw out the concerns and problems the child is going through. The short film can be seen by clicking here: - <https://youtu.be/Bme7TB5EG8A> or copying and pasting into your search engine.

### Seek Help As Soon As Possible

Get help from a professional sooner rather than later, especially if you feel uncomfortable addressing such problems. You might start with your child's pediatrician or contact a child behavioral health specialist in your area. Whatever you do, don't panic, but also don't wait. In the article (ref 2), Dr. Otto noted that medical admission is often the beginning, not the end, of treatment, for adolescents with eating disorders, which can be a long journey. Among the most significant barriers to care are a shortage of qualified providers and insurance coverage gaps.

Once one decides to get help for a child or adolescent, how does it work in Southwest Florida? The answer depends mainly on how you enter the behavioral health system. Suppose your child shows signs of depression and anxiety, the most common psychiatric symptoms. In that case, you can either make an appointment with your pediatrician or seek services through an outpatient behavioral health specialty clinic. Once seen, your child will be given a comprehensive assessment, following which a diagnosis will be made and an appropriate treatment plan recommended. You can find a list of resources at the end of the article.

The schools are another excellent resource for behavioral health services. In addition to their extensive focus on "social-emotional learning" and other aspects of overall well-being, schools employ an array of counselors, social workers, and school psychologists. Behavioral health

problems often first appear in school. The school can provide screening, crisis intervention, assessment, and time-limited treatments.

Some schools are now employing care navigators, people with lived experience with mental illness, to help children with social-emotional disturbances and their families feel empowered to manage the system<sup>4</sup>. These providers work closely with our contracted regional behavioral health mobile crisis service (Center for Progress & Excellence: (844) 395-4432), which provides on-site behavioral health assessment within one hour of referral.

There are various options for more serious behavioral health conditions where intensive treatments are indicated. Group therapy forms the hub of these programs, with individual therapy and psychopharmacology available. Patients requiring inpatient hospitalization, either voluntary or involuntary, will be referred to the appropriate facilities by outpatient providers.



## Locally available support

### **The good news**

From where I sit, there has been a sea change in attitudes towards behavioral health conditions, along with the very impressive expansion of services and community initiatives. In the last 3.5 years since I have been in SWFL, we have seen monumental gains in behavioral health services and programs at Lee Health and in the community more broadly.

At Lee Health, we have gone from four behavioral health professionals to nearly forty, resulting in an increase of over 1,300 % in our outpatient visit rate. In addition, we also have plans to expand clinics, programs, and services in Lehigh, Bonita Springs, Cape Coral, and Dunbar and have begun construction in Bonita Springs.

The resources outlined point to significant progress, promising to build a more integrated and robust behavioral health system in SWFL!

### **Additional Resources**

Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida- <https://healthcareswfl.org/>  
Delta Family Counseling - <https://deltafamilycounseling.com/>  
Progress Counseling Center - <http://www.progresscounseling.com/index.html>  
Samaritan Health - <https://www.capesamaritan.com/>  
SalusCare - <https://saluscareflorida.org/>  
Lutheran Services - <https://www.lsfnet.org/>  
Children's Advocacy Center - <https://www.cac-swfl.org/>  
Lee Physician Group Pediatric Behavioral Health Services -  
<https://www.leehealth.org/our-services/pediatric-behavioral-health>  
Elite D.N.A. Therapy Services - <https://elitedna.us/>  
Providence Family Life Center - <https://www.providencefamilylifecenter.com>

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3. Resilience: Build skills to endure hardship, the Mayo Clinic Staff. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/resilience-training/in-depth/resilience/art-20046311>
4. Werner-Seidler A, Perry Y, Calear AI, Newby JM, Christensen H. School-based depression and anxiety prevention programs for young people: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review* 2017;51;30-47.
5. 5 Reasons Why Practicing Gratitude is Important in Healthcare, Antique Nguyen, Oct 11, 2017. <https://www.precheck.com/blog/5-reasons-why-practicing-gratitude-important-healthcare>




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## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE QUALITY OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WATER - ISN'T PRETTY

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### *How You Can Help!*

#### Background

Water is essential to life, and in Florida, it is also an economic engine that fuels \$94 billion in annual tourism spending and \$12 billion in local and state sales, hotel, and excise taxes, according to Rockport Analytics LLC. When our waterways suffer, our economy suffers, too.

Historically, Florida's water followed the barely perceptible downward slope of the peninsula, from north to south. A raindrop that falls into the Kissimmee River Valley

finds itself in Lake Okeechobee. Along the water's southerly route, plants and soil would soak up excess nutrients and minerals, a vital cleansing process that restored water quality.

#### What's the problem?

Poor water quality in lakes can have many unpleasant consequences. The fish populations are affected, and algal blooms can yield unpleasant odors and appearances that reduce their aesthetic appeal.

Toxic algae blooms have led to states of emergency that have closed beaches and



restricted fishing over a large section of our west coast.

Most community stormwater systems in the Estero Bay watershed were permitted a decade ago and built with outdated treatment designs. These systems' effluent (drainage or discharge) often exceeds state water quality standards. It is unknown what the state may require for future restoration actions to reduce the impacts from residential stormwater treatment systems to address impaired water quality in Estero waterways.

## Be a Part of the Solution

[Calusa Waterkeeper](#) (CWK) and the [Estero Council of Community Leaders](#) (ECCL) have had ongoing discussions about managing nutrient runoff that has caused the impairment of Estero Bay and its tributaries. Many communities in Estero Bay's watershed are adding to the nutrient loads leading to water quality impairment that promotes harmful algal blooms, declines in seagrass coverage, and impacts property values.

Our discussions led to creating a goal for reducing nutrient runoff by establishing *Demonstration Projects* to reduce pollution for potentially broader application in

residential communities feeding the Estero Bay Watershed.

*Demonstration project standards include:*

- No detracting from a community's natural aesthetics
- Minimal annual operations and maintenance
- Nutrient load reductions that result from the project are measurable for defining success and meeting eventual regulatory compliance
- The potential for external funding
- Overall cost-effectiveness

There are several alternatives for nutrient removal from residential stormwater systems, including:

- Alum treatment (coagulation of nutrients in offline lagoons or within the storage reservoir)
- Sand filtration
- Constructed treatment wetlands or hybrid wetland treatment
- Aeration (air diffuser systems)
- Bioreactor (wood chip) technology
- Other smaller-scale measures are also available

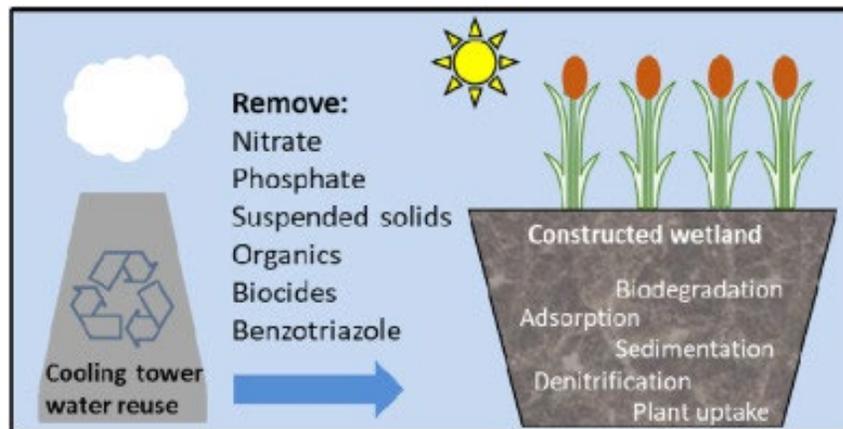
## The Assessment Process

If you would like your community to take steps to help reduce the nitrogen and phosphate stormwater runoff into our lakes and Estero Bay, [contact your community leadership and management](#). Ask them to become involved in helping improve the quality of Estero's water in our lakes, rivers, tributaries, and Estero Bay preserving our water quality for the future.

After an introductory meeting with an interested community, the next step would be conducting a site visit to determine potential alternatives--considering site compatibility and other factors--for the *Demonstration Project*.

CWK will arrange the site visit and assist with a cost/benefit analysis for alternatives that emerge as possibilities from the site visit. In the interest of establishing a solid working relationship with the community and supporting the implementation of the *Demonstration Project*, CWK will also assist the interested community with finding potential external funding for the project.

The CWK and the ECCL look forward to hearing from interested local Communities in greater Estero. Please contact Jim Gilmartin, President ECCL [ecclpres@gmail.com](mailto:ecclpres@gmail.com), or John Cassani, Calusa Waterkeeper, [jcass927@gmail.com](mailto:jcass927@gmail.com).



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