



**Beaches receive water from everything uphill, including yards, streets, and streams.**

## Staying healthy at the beach

- ✓ Check for advisories and closures on the Washington Department of Ecology BEACH Program map: [ecology.wa.gov/beach](https://ecology.wa.gov/beach)
- ✓ Practice good hygiene and help children to do the same.
- ✓ Avoid beach water in your mouth.
- ✓ Clean up after your pet.
- ✓ Carry out all trash, including fish remains and diapers.



Centers for Disease Control & Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming)

To report a spill in Washington state call  
**1-800-258-5990**

**BEACH Program Manager**  
Phone: 360-480-4868  
[ecology.wa.gov/beach](https://ecology.wa.gov/beach)

To request an ADA accommodation, contact the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) by phone at 360-407-6831 or email at [ecyadacoordinator@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:ecyadacoordinator@ecy.wa.gov).

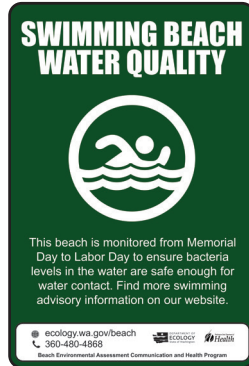
For TTY or Washington Relay Service, call 711 or 877-833-6341.

For more accessibility information online, visit Ecology's website at <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>.

## Understanding beach signs

### GOOD

**Bacteria levels are considered acceptable according to EPA standards.**



### CAUTION

**Bacteria levels do not meet EPA standards. Avoid contact with water and sand.**



### CLOSED

**Local health department has closed the beach for swimming.**



# A Guide to Healthy Swimming at Saltwater Beaches



## Washington State BEACH Program

Beach Environmental Assessment, Communication and Health

Publication 08-03-021  
Updated May 2024



US EPA funds the BEACH Program.



## What is the BEACH Program?

The Washington BEACH Program tests the water quality of saltwater recreational beaches to protect your health. We share water quality results and pollution events with the public using signs posted at the beach, our website, and an email list.

### Who is involved in the program?

Washington State Departments of Ecology and Health lead the BEACH Program. County and local agencies, tribal nations, and volunteers help collect beach water samples.

### What is the goal of the program?

We strive to reduce the risk of water-related illness by:

- ✓ Testing water for harmful bacteria at popular beaches.
- ✓ Notifying the public when water is unsafe for use or when a known pollution event occurs, such as a sewage spill.
- ✓ Sharing how polluted water can make us sick and what we can do to keep our beaches clean.

## BEACH Monitoring

We collect water samples at popular beaches from Memorial Day to Labor Day. We sample most beaches once per week.



### What do we test the water for?

We test the water for bacteria called “enterococci”. These bacteria are found in the intestines of people and warmblooded animals, and can make us sick. When enterococci are present in water, it means feces (poop) and possibly other pathogens are present. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that when the number of enterococci goes up, the risk of getting sick goes up.

If we find high levels of enterococci, local jurisdictions will issue a warning or close the beach by posting a sign. We then try to identify possible pollution sources like broken pipes or problems at nearby wastewater treatment plants.

### How do we select beaches?

We test popular swimming and wading beaches that are close to wastewater treatment plants, stormwater drainage, marinas, off-leash dog parks, or a combined sewer outfall.

### Why don't we test freshwater beaches?

The BEACH Program is funded through an EPA grant. The grant's rules do not include testing of freshwater beaches, but some counties do test freshwater beaches. Check with your county health department to learn more.

## Water Pollution

The water becomes polluted when feces—which can carry harmful bacteria, parasites, and viruses—get into the water from various sources:

- ⚠ Stormwater runoff carrying animal waste and other contaminants.
- ⚠ Leaking sewage treatment plant or septic system.
- ⚠ Contamination from swimmers.
- ⚠ Wildlife attracted by trash.

### ~ QUICK TIP ~

To reduce the risk of getting sick, avoid swimming and wading for 48 hours after it rains.



Most beaches have the highest bacteria levels after heavy rainfall.



Check for advisories and closures on the Washington Department of Ecology BEACH Program map: [ecology.wa.gov/beach](https://ecology.wa.gov/beach)