



SAFE WATER BEACHES



What is water quality?

Most beaches have water that is safe for swimming. However, you can't be sure the beach water is safe unless it's tested. Water may look clear, but can have disease-causing bacteria that are too small to see. Even if a beach is safe for swimming it doesn't mean that it's safe for drinking.

Beach water quality is usually described in terms of E. coli levels. E. coli bacteria are found in the intestines and feces of humans and animals. When E. coli is found in water, it usually means that there are other harmful bacteria in the water as well. When there are high levels of E. coli, people can get sick from the water.

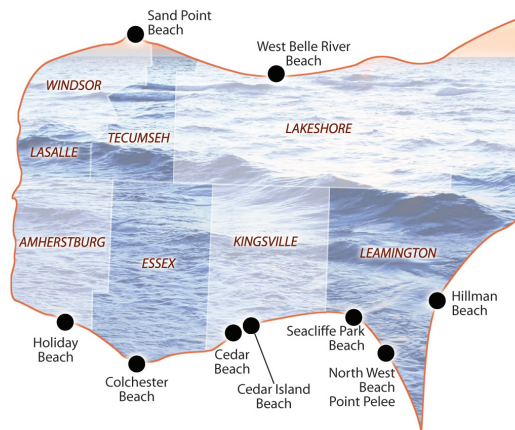
Know when to go...beach fun means safe water.

During the summer months Windsor-Essex County beaches are a great way to relax, cool down, and have some fun. But make sure your day at the beach doesn't become a day at the doctor and check to see if the water is safe to swim in.

How is it tested?

Public health units across Ontario regularly monitor E. coli levels in beach water. A sign that warns swimmers of possible health risks is posted at a beach when E. coli levels are higher than 100 per 100 ml of water. At these levels swimming isn't recommended. If the E. coli count is higher than 1000, it's NOT SAFE to swim and the beach will be CLOSED.

The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit monitors nine public beaches each week during the summer to make sure that the water is safe for swimming.



Beach water quality results are updated every Friday during the summer at www.wehealthunit.org/inspect/beaches. You can also call the Beach Hotline at 519-258-2146 ext. 426 (H2O) for updates.

For more information please call 519-258-2146 Monday through Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

How does water quality affect me?

Certain types of bacteria found in water can cause a number of illnesses. The most common are stomach and intestinal illnesses such as vomiting and diarrhea, along with lung, eye, ear, nose, or throat infections.

Swallowing contaminated water is the main way to get sick. Bacteria can also enter the body through the ears, eyes, nose, or through broken skin. Physical hazards are also a possible danger when swimming in polluted water. If water isn't clear objects like rocks and broken glass are much less visible and more likely to cause injury. If you can't see your feet underwater when you're standing in waist deep water, it's a good idea not to swim.

JUST THE FACTS



Does rain affect the water quality?

Weather conditions are the leading factor that affects water quality. Bacteria levels increase with an increase in rain and with the strength of the wind blowing onto the shore. Rainwater washes fecal material from cats, dogs, birds, and other wildlife into storm sewers which flow directly into nearby rivers and lakes. We recommend that you don't swim for at least 24 to 48 hours after a rainfall, or if the water is cloudy from a strong on-shore wind. Calm, clear water is usually associated with lower bacterial levels, while rough or cloudy water often means unsafe water.

What's polluting our beaches?

There are many sources of water pollution. Chemical and biological pollutants can come from factories, farms, boats, marinas, and city streets. However, beaches are closed due to water pollution from bacteria. In rare cases, the Medical Officer of Health may order a beach closed due to a chemical or other hazardous substance spill.

How can I help reduce water pollution?

- Always pick up your animal's waste. Pet waste is a major source of bacteria in water.
- Detach eavestrough downspouts so that rainwater goes into the ground rather than into a sewer.
- Reduce water use in your household. This helps avoid overflow problems at some municipal sewage treatment plants that may cause untreated sewage to enter lakes and rivers.
- Don't discharge backwash from your pool onto a road. Pool water should be discharged either to the sewer, or across the lawn to the storm sewer.
- Consider a driveway of crushed or interlocking stone. This type of driveway lowers the amount of storm water that goes into the sewer system.
- In agricultural areas, fence livestock away from streams and give them alternative sources of water. This benefits the health of both the herd and the environment.
- Make sure that runoff from feedlots and manure piles are properly contained.
- Upgrade septic systems and keep them in good working order.

Fun in the Sun

Don't forget your sun safety when you're at the beach. Here are some tips on how to protect yourself:

- Limit your time in the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Stay in the shade as much as possible. If there isn't any shade around, create your own with umbrellas.
- Wear a wide brimmed hat.
- Wear sunglasses with UV protection.
- Put on loose fitting clothes that cover your arms and legs to protect your skin.
- Use a sunscreen lotion or cream that is SPF 15 or more. Use a sunscreen that says "broad-spectrum" on the label. It will protect you from most of the harmful UV rays.
- Put sunscreen on your skin 20 minutes before you go out. It's a good idea to put on more sunscreen 20 minutes after being out in the sun.
- Remember to put sunscreen on your lips, ears, and nose. These parts of your body burn easily.
- Put sunscreen on again after you go swimming or if you are sweating because it gets washed off by water and sweat.

For more information.

Windsor-Essex County Health Unit

www.wehealthunit.org/diseases-conditions/flu • 519-258-2146

Health Canada - Recreational Water Quality

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/recreat-eng.php

CDC (US) - Healthy Swimming

www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming

References:

Health Canada. (2007). *Recreational water quality*. Retrieved June 6, 2008 from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/recreat-eng.php>.

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (1998). *Beach management protocol*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.