



Summit County Public Health

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Frequently Asked Questions – Beach Water Monitoring

Beach water can become polluted from many sources including, but not limited to, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and combined sewer overflows; urban, rural, and agricultural runoff; malfunctioning septic tanks and aeration systems; industrial wastes, boating wastes, human and animal wastes. Natural pools, reservoirs, lakes or parts of such are not generally recommended for public bathing places and such bathing places are used at the operator's risk.

What are the risks of swimming in polluted water?

The most common illness associated with swimming in, and ingesting polluted water is gastroenteritis. Typical symptoms include nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, fever, headache, and diarrhea. Other illnesses associated with swimming in such waters include shigellosis, cryptosporidiosis, and giardiasis, as well as eye, ear, nose, and throat infections.

What can I do to protect my family and myself?

Do not swim if you are sick or if you have a weakened immune system. Do not swim near storm drains or other visible discharge pipes. Do not swallow the water – try to keep your face and head out of the water. Always shower after swimming.

After a heavy rainfall, wait 24 hours before going swimming.

What can I do to help keep the beaches clean?

Conserve water. Excess water use at home means more water that has to be processed by sewage treatment plants. This can lead to sewer overflows and raw sewage discharges into beach areas.

Dispose of animal waste properly. When exercising your pet, collect and properly dispose of its waste. This helps to reduce the amount of animal waste that may be washed into the beach area from storm water runoff.

Use natural substances to fertilize lawns and gardens. Use compost made from natural products instead of chemical fertilizer. Minimize the use of pesticides and herbicides whenever possible.

Maintain private septic systems. Keep your septic tank or aeration system in good working order. Have it pumped and serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. This will help prevent leaking and inadvertent discharge of treated or untreated sewage into the storm sewer – and ultimately into the beach area.

Properly dispose of marine and recreational boating wastes. Empty sewage holding tanks and portable toilet waste in proper onshore sanitary facilities. Perform regular service on boat engines, to minimize discharge of gasoline and motor oil.

Do not throw trash into the water.

I have heard that water samples can be taken at bathing beaches, what are the acceptable standards?

Acceptability of bathing beach waters is based on the single, most recent sample collected. Summit County Public Health recommends warning signs be posted if E. coli levels exceed 235 colony forming units (cfu) per 100 milliliters of beach water tested.

If E. coli bacteria levels exceed 235 cfu, ODH and Summit County recommend the posting of signs to inform beach users of conditions that may make it unsafe for some to swim. The signs should read: “Water Quality Advisory – Bacterial levels here currently exceed state standards. Children, the elderly and those in ill health are advised not to swim.”

Gastroenteritis is the most common illness associated with swimming in polluted water. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, cramps, fever, headache and diarrhea. Swimmers can reduce their chances of getting sick by steering clear of visible discharge pipes; keeping their head and face out of the water; not swallowing the water; showering after swimming; and waiting 24 hours after a heavy rainfall before swimming.

Should you have any questions regarding the acceptability of the water at the bathing beaches in your community, please do not hesitate to contact us at 330-926-5600.