

SIGNS USED IN POSTING ADVISORIES



ATTENTION

SWIMMING IN THIS AREA IS NOT RECOMMENDED. BACTERIA TESTING INDICATES LEVELS OF CONTAMINATION THAT MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH. THIS ADVISORY AFFECTS WATERS WITHIN 200' OF THIS SIGN.

OFFICE OF THE STATE HEALTH DIRECTOR

ATTENTION

THESE WATERS MAY BE CONTAMINATED BY HUMAN OR ANIMAL WASTE. SWIMMING IS NOT ADVISED IN THESE WATERS BECAUSE OF THE INCREASED RISK OF ILLNESS

OFFICE OF THE STATE HEALTH DIRECTOR

More Information

For more information about the recreational water quality testing program, contact J.D. Potts or Christine Miller at (252) 726-6827, or e-mail them at the following addresses:

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christine.miller@ncmail.net

Recreational Water Quality Monitoring Program
Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality Section
P.O. Box 769
Morehead City, NC 28557
(252) 726-6827

<http://www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/shellfish/index.html>

Testing results and posting information can be viewed on-line at www.earth911.org.



Michael F. Easley, Governor
William G. Ross Jr., Secretary

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N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources
Division of Environmental Health

Monitoring Coastal Waters

What is this program? The North Carolina Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality Section began monitoring the state's coastal recreational waters in 1997. The coastal waters we monitor include ocean beaches, sounds, bays and estuarine rivers.

Why we are doing it? The program's primary purpose is to protect the public's health by monitoring the quality of North Carolina's coastal recreational waters and notifying the public when bacteriological standards for safe bodily contact are exceeded. This is done by testing waters for the bacteria enterococci, which are indicator organisms. This means they are not harmful themselves, but they are present at the same time as other organisms that can cause illness. Swimming advisories may be posted on a temporary basis if a single sample exceeds the standards for that area, which are set depending on use levels. Advisories posted based on single sample results are retested immediately. High-use sites, which include all ocean beaches, must also maintain an acceptable running monthly average. A swimming advisory will also be issued if a site exceeds the monthly standard.

What happens if waters exceed the standard? If the swimming standard is exceeded, a press release is sent out to inform the public and advisory signs are posted at the swimming site. Please note that the program does not 'close' beaches. Staff issue advisories recommending people do not swim in the waters that exceeded the standard. Discharges of stormwater and flood water into swimming areas may also prompt precautionary swimming advisories that will last for 24 hours after the discharge has ended.

What are the causes of polluted waters? Recreational water contamination can be caused by stormwater, which is created when rainfall carries pollutants found on the ground surfaces into coastal waters. Other sources include failing septic systems, sanitary sewer leaks or spills, boats emptying their heads in the water rather than using a pump-out station, pets, livestock, wildlife or even swimmers themselves, especially children in diapers.

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the coastal water quality like in North Carolina? In general, North Carolina coastal water quality is very good. We collected more than 6,000 water samples on the coast last year and issued 46 swimming advisories, most of which involved sound-side waters and lasted for a single day. While we would prefer to have issued no swimming advisories at all, the relatively low number of advisories and the days they lasted show that the state has primarily localized, temporary problems.

Will I get sick if I swim in waters under a swimming advisory? Not necessarily, but you are at an increased risk of illness.

Where are the disease-causing organisms coming from and how are they getting into the water? Pathogens come from both human and animal causes. Poorly treated wastewater from treatment plants, malfunctioning septic systems and boat discharges are sources of fecal contamination. Stormwater runoff from agricultural and urban areas delivers pathogens from humans, livestock, wildlife and pets into recreational waters. Germs rinsed off children and other swimmers directly into the bathing area are also sources of contamination.

Can I get sick from swimming in freshwater lakes and rivers? Yes. Freshwater is affected by runoff and point source discharges just like coastal waters. Unfortunately, the state does not currently have a monitoring program for inland recreational waters. The public should avoid freshwater swimming after heavy rain, especially near storm drains.

Frequently Asked Questions

How many stations do you monitor and how often do you monitor them? The section samples 241 stations throughout the coastal area at different frequencies, depending on the time of year and use patterns of the site. The ocean beaches and other high usage areas are sampled once per week between the beginning of April and the end of September. All stations are sampled twice per month during October, and then once per month from November through March. Swimming advisories are not issued in the winter because few people are in the water at that time.

How long does a swimming advisory stay posted? Anywhere from 24 hours to several weeks, depending on whether the site went over the single sample standard or the monthly standard. If the single sample level is exceeded, then the area is retested and the advisory may be lifted the next day. If the monthly standard is exceeded, two acceptable samples must be collected on consecutive weeks for the advisory to be lifted.

Where can I get more information? Our Web site is listed on the back for more information. To see where the state has swimming advisories, visit the Earth911 Web site at www.earth911.org. In partnership with Earth911, North Carolina's swimming advisories are updated daily during swimming season.

