

## STAYING HEALTHY AT THE BEACH

Check the BEACH Program website before you go to the beach to make sure your destination beach hasn't been closed due to pollution. Practice good hygiene and help children to do the same. Clean up after your pet. Carry out all trash. Avoid getting beach water in your mouth. Remember, your beach receives water runoff from everything uphill including yards, streets, and streams.

Washington BEACH Program  
Surf the Web Before You Surf the Beach!  
[www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/beach](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/beach)

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

To report a spill in Washington State:  
1-800-258-5990



Questions? Comments?  
Contact the BEACH Program Manager  
Phone: (360) 480-4868  
[www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/beach](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/beach)

If you need this publication in an alternate format, call (360) 407-6764. Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.

## UNDERSTANDING BEACH SIGNS



### GOOD

Bacteria levels are considered acceptable according to EPA recommendations.



### CAUTION

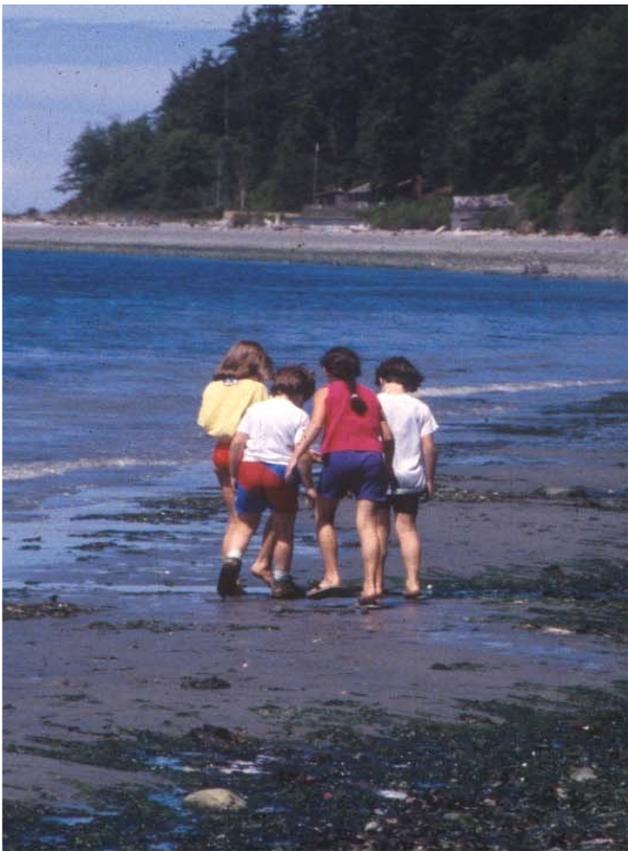
Bacteria levels do not meet EPA recommendations. Children, elderly, and those in ill health are advised not to swim.



### CLOSED

Local health department has closed the beach for swimming.

# A Guide to Healthy Swimming at Saltwater Beaches



Washington State's  
**BEACH PROGRAM**  
Beach, Environmental Assessment,  
Communication and Health

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## BEACH PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The BEACH Program tests the water quality of heavily used saltwater recreational swimming beaches to protect your health. We communicate water quality results and pollution events to the public by signs posted at the beach, a website, and a listserv.

### Who is involved in the program?

The Washington BEACH Program is led by the Washington State Departments of Ecology and Health. County and local agencies, tribal nations, and volunteers help to test water at beaches.

### What is the goal of the program?

We strive to reduce the risk of disease for people who play in saltwater by:

- Testing for bacteria levels at popular, high-risk beaches.
- Notifying users when bacteria results are high or when a known pollution event occurs, such as a sewage spill.
- Telling people how polluted water can make them sick and what each of us can do to keep our beaches clean.

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

The BEACH Program is funded through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The rules from the grant don't allow us to test freshwater swimming beaches. At this time Washington State doesn't have a freshwater swimming beach testing program, but some counties test these beaches. Check with your County Health Department to learn more.

## BEACH MONITORING

The BEACH Program monitors high-risk swimming beaches from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The program samples most beaches once per week.



### What do we test for?

During the summer, we test the beach for bacteria called “enterococci” to verify that bacterial pollution isn't getting to the beach. These bacteria originate from the intestines of warm-blooded animals and indicate that feces (poop) and possibly pathogens are present. EPA has determined that when the number of enterococci goes up, the risk of people getting sick goes up.

If we find high levels of enterococci, we inspect the beach for possible pollution sources like broken pipes or problems at wastewater treatment plants. If feces pollution is getting to the beach, we work with the community to try to fix the problem.

### How are beaches selected for monitoring?

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

## WATER CONTAMINATION

### How is water contaminated?

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

- Children not properly cleaned after using the bathroom.
- A diarrhea incident in the water.
- Stormwater runoff carrying animal waste.
- High volume of swimmers.
- Improperly disposed of diapers.
- A combined sewage overflow (CSO) event.
- A sewage treatment plant or septic system that is malfunctioning.

### QUICK TIP

Most beaches have the highest bacteria levels after a heavy rainfall. To reduce the risk of getting sick, avoid swimming and wading for 48 hours after rain.

