

## 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 STATE HEALTH DIRECTOR

## More Information

For more information about the  
N.C. Recreational Water Quality Program,  
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Recreational Water Quality Monitoring Program  
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Roy Cooper, Governor  
Elizabeth S. Biser, DEQ Secretary

**N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries**  
Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality Section

## North Carolina Recreational Water Quality Program



**N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries**

N.C. Department of Environmental Quality

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## Monitoring Coastal Waters

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**What is this program?** The N.C. Recreational Water Quality Program began monitoring the state's coastal recreational waters in 1997. The coastal waters monitored include ocean beaches, sounds, bays and estuarine rivers.

**Why are we 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 bacteria

levels exceed state and federal standards for swimming and water play. This is done by testing of waters for the bacteria enterococci. Enterococci are not known to be harmful themselves, but they are present at the same time as other organisms that can cause illness. Swimming notifications may be issued on a temporary basis if a single sample exceeds the standard for an area. Notifications issued based on single sample results are retested immediately. Daily use sites, which include all ocean beaches, must also maintain an acceptable running monthly average.

**What happens if waters exceed the standard?** If the swimming standard is exceeded a Pending Swimming Advisory is issued and the public is notified via a social media release. If the resample exceeds the standard, a Swimming Advisory is issued and the public will be notified by a press release, social media release, and advisory signs are posted at the swimming site. The Recreational Water Quality 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 a swimming advisory that will last for 24 hours after the discharge has ended.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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**What are the causes of polluted waters?** The Recreational Water Quality Program tests for a type of bacteria called Enterococci, which is found in the intestines of warm-blooded animals such as birds, racoons and other wild- life, domestic dogs, and people. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that enterococci bacteria closely correlate with the incidence of human illness .Most often, swimming advisories are triggered after heavy rains, especially if the swimming area is near storm drains or ocean outfalls.

**What's the coastal water quality like in North Carolina?** In general, North Carolina coastal water quality is very good. On average, over 6,000 water samples are collected each year with generally less than 1 percent of the samples collected exceeding the swimming standard that warrant an advisory. While we would prefer to not have to issue swimming advisories at all, the relatively low number of advisories and the days they typically last show that the state has primarily localized, temporary problems.

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

**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. Storm water runoff from agricultural and urban areas delivers pathogens from humans, livestock, wildlife and pets into recreational waters. Germs rinsed off other swimmers and children directly into the bathing area are also sources of contamination.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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**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, but the state does not have a monitoring program for inland recreational waters. The public should avoid freshwater swimming after heavy rain, especially near storm drains.

**How many stations do you monitor and how often do you monitor them?** The section samples approximately 215 locations throughout the coastal area at different frequencies, depending on the time of year and the site's use patterns. 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 during November through March. Swimming advisories are not issued in 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.

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