



## **BEACH GUARD**

The Beach Guard system allows local beach managers to post real-time beach monitoring and notification data online, and allows the public to view beach advisories that might be in place.

Water samples are collected by Summit County Public Health at licensed bathing beaches and the results are reported using this system. If the sample results are greater than the recreational standard of 235 colony forming units of E. coli bacteria, the operator is instructed to post an advisory to warn swimmers of the risk of illness associated with water contact. The advisory remains posted until a follow up sample result is below the recreational standard.

<https://publicapps.odh.ohio.gov/beachguardpublic/>

### **What do the different advisories mean?**



#### **Bacteria Contamination Advisory**

Posted when the level of bad bacteria in the water has reached unsafe levels and could make you sick. Children, the elderly and those in ill health or weakened immune systems are advised not to swim.



#### **Recreational Public Health Advisory**

Avoid all contact with the water. Algal toxins have been found at unsafe levels. Swimming and wading are not recommended. Keep pets away. For more information go to [www.ohioalgaefinfo.com](http://www.ohioalgaefinfo.com) or call 1-866-644-6224

## What are the beach water standards?

Recommendations issued by the Ohio Department of Health for posting advisory signs at beach areas are based upon the E. coli bacteria content of water samples collected at each beach.

Evaluation of water sample results is based on the single sample maximum standard adopted by the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 2004 for the evaluation of fresh water beaches. The single sample maximum standard allows beach managers to react more quickly to short-term changes in water quality, thus providing a greater level of protection for the bathing public.

**The single sample maximum for E. coli bacteria content is 235 colony forming units (cfu) per 100mL of water tested.**

## What should be included in a bathing beach advisory sign?

1. If the criterion for E. coli bacteria is exceeded, a recommendation will be made for posting the beach with signs that advise against swimming due to high bacteria levels.
2. Suggested language for posting a beach includes: Water Quality Advisory - Bacterial levels here currently exceed state standards. Children, the elderly and those in ill health are advised not to swim.
3. Advisory signs should be of sufficient size to be easily read and posted in a conspicuous location to be easily seen, preferably near all commonly used entrances and at other places of congregation at the beach (e.g., rest rooms, changing areas, lifeguard stations, etc.)
4. Signs should be readily available at all times in the event a posting is suggested or required.

## How do I know when it is safe to swim at the beach?

When the bacteria and/or cyanotoxin sample results are above the threshold, the beach operator erects advisory signs to alert you to the potentially hazardous conditions. These results can be found on the [BeachGuard webpage](#) where you can also sign up to receive an alert when there is a change in the advisory status.

## I saw an advisory sign at my beach. What does it mean?

There are two types of advisory signs that could be posted at the beach. One type of advisory is for bacterial contamination and the other is for cyanotoxins. The sign means that the water sample result is currently higher than the threshold that is used for evaluating beaches. If you are already sick, or if your immune system is weakened, your risk of becoming ill is greater if you swim when these advisories are

in place.

## What kinds of illnesses could I get from swimming in contaminated water?

The most common illness associated with swimming in polluted water is gastroenteritis with the following symptoms: nausea, vomiting, headache, stomachache, fever and diarrhea. Other illnesses associated with swimming include eye, ear, nose, and throat infections. Cyanotoxin exposure could result in skin rashes and may impact neurological and liver function.

## If I get sick after swimming, what should I do?

If you become sick after swimming at the beach, you should consult your doctor. You should also tell the beach operator or your local health district. That way, the water can be tested again and the beach area can be assessed for potential contamination sources.

## What are the sampling procedures for collecting composite cyanotoxins samples?

**A Guide to Collecting Grab and Composite Cyanotoxin Samples** - created by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA)

- This [video](#) demonstrates cyanotoxin sample collection procedures at beaches for both grab and composite samples.

For other samples - To assure consistency in collecting samples for analysis, the following procedures are used:

1. Specific sites (or the same locations) should be designated for collecting samples during the bathing season.
2. Collectors should sample where the water is about three (3) feet deep, in an area of the beach generally used for swimming.
3. The sample bottle should be inverted. With a sweeping motion, the sample should be collected from about one (1) foot below the water surface.
4. Every precaution should be taken to minimize sediment or debris in the sample. In cases where debris or sediment is present throughout the sample, this information should be noted on the laboratory form.
5. The collector should complete the laboratory form, noting such items as water temperature and clarity, and general weather conditions as indicated.

Additional information can be found on the Ohio Department of Health's website at <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/bathing-beach-monitoring/welcome>