



Keep Our Beaches Clean: Prevent the Beachwater Pollution That Makes Swimmers Sick

Beach vacations are an annual summer event for many families. But beachgoers at polluted beaches around the country may bring back an unwanted souvenir from their trip: ear infections, stomach flu, skin rashes, and other illnesses that are caused by polluted beachwater.

To help keep our beaches clean, NRDC supports improved beachwater testing to detect the pathogens that can cause health problems in swimmers. Bills now pending in Congress would provide funding for much-needed beach cleanup efforts and help ensure that the public is notified promptly when beaches are unsafe for swimming. These bills will help make sure that our beaches are safe for swimming every day.

Polluted Beaches Can Cause Health Problems for Swimmers

Beach closings and advisories are at a record high in U.S. coastal waters because of beachwater contamination from human and animal waste. When it rains, untreated sewage and contaminated stormwater flow into beachwaters from overflowing sewers, stormwater pipes, and treatment plant bypasses, carrying human waste, animal waste, trash, and other bacteria-laden discharges into the water where it can make swimmers sick.

The most common health impact of this contamination is severe stomach upset, but swimmers can also get earaches, pinkeye, respiratory ailments, and even very serious illnesses like meningitis and hepatitis. Often swimmers don't realize that their illness was contracted while swimming at a contaminated beach. Small children, the elderly, pregnant women, and cancer patients and others with weakened immune systems are most at risk for illness caused by contaminated beachwater. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children under the age of nine had more reports of diarrhea and vomiting from exposure to waterborne parasites than any other age group.¹

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How Clean Is Your Favorite Beach?

Visit www.nrdc.org/beaches to read NRDC's annual report *Testing the Waters: A Guide to Water Quality at Vacation Beaches*, and see whether your favorite beach is safe for swimming.



Tips for Staying Healthy and Safe This Summer

- **Pick a beach that is tested regularly for cleanliness** and that notifies you when it is unsafe to go in the water. NRDC surveys beachwater quality data every year. Visit www.nrdc.org to find out if your favorite beach is meeting public health standards, how often it is monitored, and how the public is informed when it is not safe for swimming.
- **Wait at least 24 hours to swim at the beach after a heavy rainfall**—particularly if you have cuts or scratches. Overflowing sewage or contaminated stormwater can run off into our coastal waters after rain, flooding our favorite swimming beaches with dangerous pollution that can cause infections, rashes, fever, chills, and nausea. NRDC is helping homeowners, businesses, and cities design smart solutions to curb stormwater runoff.
- **Help keep pollution out of our beachwater** by properly disposing of pet waste, trash, toxic household products, used motor oil, and other pollutants which can make their way from your drain into coastal waters.

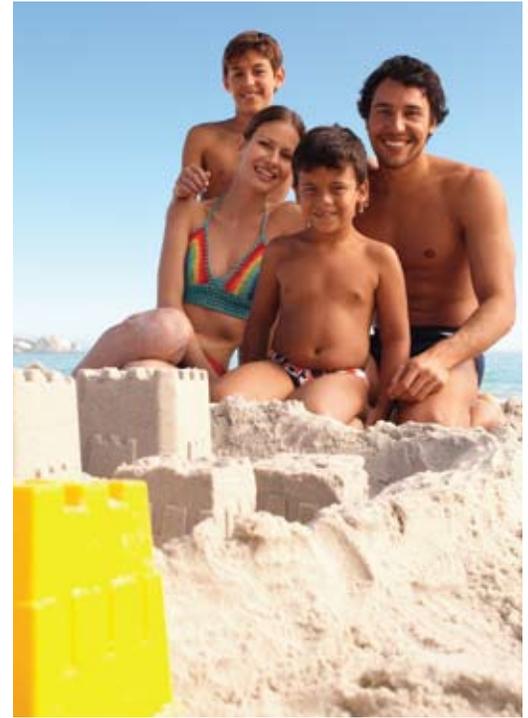
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Federal Action Can Help Keep Our Beaches Clean

In 2000, Congress passed the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act, which provided federal funds to state and local agencies to set up beachwater monitoring and public notification programs. Since that time, every coastal state in the United States, including the Great Lakes and Alaska, has established programs that test beachwater for fecal contamination.

While those testing programs represent a significant step forward, the tests they use take 24 hours to produce results, and they test for indicators that are shown to correlate with severe stomach upset instead of all likely health impacts.

The Clean Coastal Environment and Public Health Act (H.R. 2093/S. 878) now pending in Congress would reauthorize the BEACH Act and build on its ability to protect public health at the beach.



The Clean Coastal Environment and Public Health legislation would:

- increase the funding available to state and local public health agencies to test waters;
- require the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to approve and beaches to use a rapid test method;
- authorize funding for programs to identify sources of beachwater pollution;
- improve coordination between beachwater managers and the environmental officials who can prevent beachwater pollution.

Beachgoers Deserve Safe Summer Beaches

Passing these bills would ensure that U.S. beaches are adequately monitored and that the public receives timely and accurate information when beaches are not safe. The bills would also provide funding to find the sources of beachwater pollution and clean up pollution before it reaches the beach. If adequately funded, these bills can help keep our beaches clean and safe.