



# Safe For Swimming?

Pollution at America's beaches, and what we can do about it

## Pollution at beaches threatens our health

Americans love the beach. But too often, the water at our beaches can make us sick.

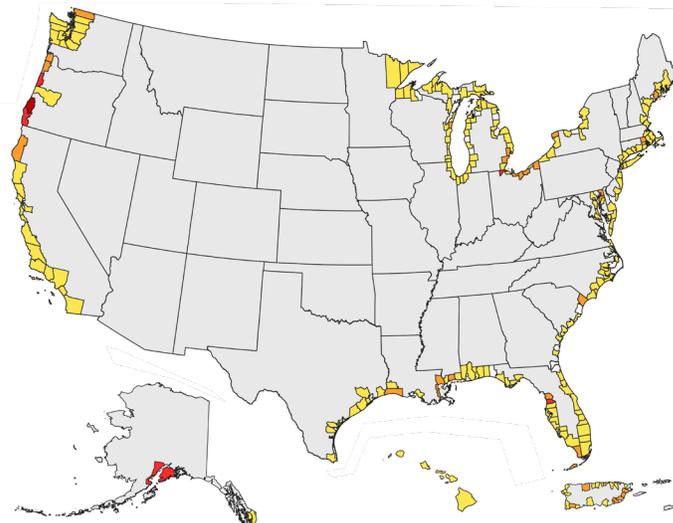
Swimming in contaminated water can cause gastrointestinal illness as well as respiratory disease, ear and eye infection, and skin rash. Each year, there are an estimated 57 million cases of illness in the U.S. resulting from swimming in oceans, lakes, rivers and ponds.

Contaminated water can also trigger health warnings or closures that interfere with our ability to enjoy the beach. There were more than 8,700 health warnings or closures at U.S. ocean and Great Lakes beaches in 2022, affecting one out of every 12 swimming days.

## Roughly one-half of U.S. beaches had potentially unsafe contamination levels in 2022

In 2022, 1,761 out of 3,192 tested beaches nationwide (55%) experienced at least one day on which fecal contamination reached potentially unsafe levels — that is, exceeding EPA's most protective "Beach Action Value," a conservative, precautionary tool states can use to make beach notification decisions.

And 363 beaches — approximately one out of every nine beaches tested nationwide — had potentially unsafe levels of fecal contamination on at on at least 25% of the days testing took place. (For more local information on beach water safety in 2022, please see the other side of this fact sheet.)



Counties by average percentage of potentially unsafe days in 2022  
 0% <=25% 25%-50% 50%-75% 75%-100%

Potentially unsafe levels of fecal contamination were found at beaches across the country in 2022.

## Runoff, sewage, agriculture among causes of beach pollution

Polluted stormwater runoff following rainfall events was the leading cause of beach closures and health advisories in 2022, among the roughly 45 percent of events for which a cause has been determined. Other significant sources of pathogen pollution that can make swimmers sick include sewage overflows, septic systems and in some places, manure from industrial livestock production.



Top beach sites by potentially unsafe swimming days, 2022

Beach name	County	Potentially unsafe days in 2022	Percentage of testing days with potentially unsafe water
Bruce Beach*	Escambia County	20	33%
South Beach	Monroe County	17	68%
Sanders Beach	Escambia County	16	28%
Dubois Park	Palm Beach County	14	22%
Bayou Texar	Escambia County	13	28%
Palma Sola South	Manatee County	13	24%
Higgs Beach	Monroe County	11	46%
Carl Gray Park	Bay County	11	44%
North Shore Ocean Terrace	Miami-Dade County	10	18%
Bird Key Park	Sarasota County	9	16%

\* Beach has more than one associated testing site, which may affect number of potentially unsafe days.

## Beach pollution in Florida

◀ In 2022, 244 beaches were tested for fecal indicator bacteria in Florida. At 170 of those beaches, testing found potentially unsafe water on at least one day, and 14 beaches were potentially unsafe on at least 25% of the days they were tested. Bruce Beach in Escambia County tested as potentially unsafe for 20 days, more days than any other beach in the state, and 33% of the days that sampling took place. In Hernando County (with just one monitored beach in 2022), the average beach was potentially unsafe for swimming on 75% of the days that sampling took place, a higher percentage than any other county in the state.

## Solutions to prevent beach pollution

Ensuring our beaches are safe for swimming will require officials to take several key steps:

- Continue investing in water infrastructure. While the bipartisan infrastructure law provides nearly \$12 billion for sewage and stormwater, ending sewage overflows will require additional investments from state and local governments.
- Prioritizing “green infrastructure” projects such as green roofs and rain gardens to reduce stormwater flow.
- Protecting streams and wetlands, reducing the amount of pollution that finds its way to beaches.
- Adopting moratoria on industrial-scale livestock operations, especially those upstream from or in close proximity to beaches.

For more information on water pollution at beaches, as well as sources and detailed methodology, visit our “Safe for Swimming?” webpage at: <http://environmentamerica.org/Florida/center/resources/safe-for-swimming/>

