



Frequently Asked Questions: 2021 KETCHIKAN BEACHES MONITORING PROGRAM

What is the BEACH program?

The Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in 2002 in response to increased occurrences of water-borne illnesses. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers grant funds to states, tribes and territories under the Act to establish monitoring and public notification programs. In Alaska, the BEACH funds come through DEC and are typically administered as grants to local communities. The BEACH program has established national marine water quality monitoring and reporting standards for fecal waste contamination and notifies the public when levels exceed state standards.

Why monitor Ketchikan beaches?

A monitoring program was initiated for the Ketchikan beaches in 2017 to evaluate potential health risks by fecal coliform and enterococci bacteria, and to notify the public when levels exceeded state recreation standards. Ketchikan was included in the beach program based on the information provided by Ketchikan Indian Community in the Alaska Beach Survey, community concern, and the numerous potential bacteria sources within recreational beach areas. The monitoring information can be used by local communities to help make informed decisions.

When and where does monitoring occur?

Monitoring generally begins in May and continues into September to provide the information over the entire recreation period. Water samples are collected early in the week and sent to a lab for analysis. Results are posted to DEC's web page and on social media on Thursday or Friday that week.

In 2021, water samples will be collected at the same 12 Ketchikan beaches monitored yearly since 2018. These are areas of high use during the recreation season and are areas where contact with water is most likely. The 12 beaches include: Knudson Cove, South Point Higgins, Shull, Sunset, South Refuge Cove State Recreation Site, Thomas Basin, Seaport, Rotary Beach, Rotary Pool, Mountain Point Surprise Beach, Mountain Point Cultural Foods, Herring Cove.

What are potential sources of bacteria?

Past years of bacteria monitoring have shown elevated levels of bacteria along the Ketchikan coastline from several potential sources, including private and public sewer treatment systems, individual septic tanks, private watercraft, ferries, and cruise ships, wildlife, and pet feces.

Is the water safe to swim or fish in?

When elevated fecal bacteria levels are present in the marine water, precautionary measures are advised. DEC recommends people avoid exposure, such as swimming in the water, and wash after contact with the marine water. Commonly documented health issues from swimming in bacteria contaminated recreational waters include gastrointestinal illness, respiratory illnesses, skin rashes, and ear, eye, and wound infections.

Is the fish safe to eat?

Yes, fish are safe to eat, however we recommend you rinse fish with clean water after they have been

harvested from the area. Please follow safe food handling recommendations and cook seafood to a minimum internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit to destroy any bacteria. Note that freezing alone does not kill pathogens.

What happens if there are elevated results?

DEC will continue to share monitoring results with the City of Ketchikan, Ketchikan Gateway Borough, and other stakeholders. If the levels exceed state recreation standards, DEC will send a notification to stakeholders via the Alaska Beach Program Listserv, post on DEC social media accounts, and update the Alaska Beach Program Webpage. A nearly daily local radio spot will remind beach goers to visit the Alaska Beach Program website to check out the interactive map showing advisories at specific beaches, monitoring reports, press releases, and other project resources. And the beach landowner posts advisory signs at the affected beach.

Are you interested in receiving monitoring updates? You can sign up for the Beach Program Listserv by clicking the link at beaches.alaska.gov.

What can I do to help?

Beach users can pick up after their pets, stay healthy by washing your hands after contacting beach water, and before eating and drinking. Finally, stay up to date on current water quality conditions by visiting the DEC Beach webpage.

For Additional Program Information

Ketchikan Program

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