



## Frequently Asked Questions: KENAI RIVER BEACH 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 Kenai River beaches?

A monitoring program was initiated for the Kenai River beaches in 2010 to evaluate potential health risks by fecal coliform and enterococci bacteria, and to notify the public when levels exceeded state recreation standards. 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 2022 DEC will be piloting testing a predictive model alongside water sampling<sup>1</sup>.

Water samples will be collected at North and South Kenai beaches. These are areas of high use during the recreation season and are areas where contact with water is most likely.

### What are potential sources of bacteria?

Birds, primarily gulls, have consistently been the most common host organism identified through genetic analysis tools. Birds are attracted to Kenai beaches by improperly disposed of fish waste and trash. Dogs are the second most common source of bacteria. Hooved animals and human genetic markers are rare but do appear in samples. DEC encourages all beach visitors to properly dispose of fish, pack out trash, pick up after dogs, and use the provided restroom facilities at beaches.

### 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 direct exposure, such as swimming in the water, and wash after direct contact with the marine water when bacteria levels are elevated. Commonly documented

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Frequently Asked Question: Alaska Beach Program Virtual Beach Model* for more information on the predictive modeling pilot project.

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.

### **Have any steps been taken to improve bacteria pollution on the Kenai Beaches?**

Yes, the City of Kenai has implemented multiple Best Management Practices (BMPs) to improve water quality at Kenai Beaches. These BMPs include clearing fish carcasses from the beach, providing dumpsters, and installing portable toilets for beach visitors.

In addition to water monitoring, DEC is providing educational tools and resources online, at public events, and over the radio.

### **What happens if there are elevated results?**

DEC will continue to share monitoring results with the City of Kenai 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.

Are you interested in receiving monitoring updates? You can sign up for the Beach Program Listserv by clicking the link at [beaches.alaska.gov](https://beaches.alaska.gov).

### **What can I do to help?**

Beach users can discourage gulls and other birds from congregating on the beach by properly disposing of their fish (chop waste into small pieces and throw into fast moving out flowing water), pack out all waste, and use provided outhouses and dumpsters. Pick up after your pets. Keep you and your family healthy by washing your hands after contacting river 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**

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