



Frequently Asked Questions: 2022 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?

During the 2022 recreational beach season, six Ketchikan beaches (South Point Higgins Beach, Sunset Beach, Thomas Basin, Rotary Park Pool, Mountain Point Cultural Food, and Herring Cove) will be monitored twice a month June through August, and once in early September. These beaches were selected based on frequency of water quality standards exceedances in previous years and the likelihood that primary contact recreation could affect beach users.

Concurrent to water monitoring, DEC will be pilot testing EPA's Virtual Beach¹ predictive model to predict bacteria levels at these beaches. Results will be posted on DEC's beach program webpage.

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.

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

Is the fish safe to eat?

Yes, fish are safe to eat, however DEC recommends 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 website.

A 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. In addition, 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?

Help keep Alaska's beaches clean by picking up after pets, properly disposing of fish waste, and picking up trash. Beach users can stay healthy by washing hands and showering after swimming or recreating in the beach water. Cooking fish and shellfish to an internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit. Keeping up to date on current water quality conditions by visiting the DEC Beach webpage. And avoiding direct contact with water when bacteria advisories are in effect.

For Additional Program Information

Ketchikan Program

Contact: Gretchen Augat

Phone: (907) 465-5023

Email: gretchen.augat@alaska.gov

Website: beaches.alaska.gov