



HEALTHY SWIMMING



NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF
**Environmental
Services**

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Potential Problems

Diseases such as gastroenteritis and Giardia can be transmitted to swimmers at freshwater and coastal beaches. Pathogens, the organisms that cause these diseases, can enter the water through the feces of infected humans, waterfowl, livestock and domestic animals. Beaches are susceptible to fecal contamination from many sources including swimmers, wildlife, nearby septic systems, storm drains and farm runoff.

Protecting Public Health

It is not possible to quickly and easily test beach water for the many pathogens that cause illness. However, water can be tested for bacteria that are commonly found in the feces of warm blooded animals (E. Coli or Enterococci). Fecal bacteria levels can be used to determine the risk swimmers have for coming in contact with disease-causing pathogens. If bacteria levels are high, a beach advisory is issued to let the public know that water contact might not be safe at the beach that day.

Other Health Concerns

Swimmer's itch, or duck itch, is an itchy, uncomfortable rash that some swimmers suffer after a trip to the beach. The rash is an allergic reaction to microorganisms that are transferred into the water by birds. Efforts to reduce the number of birds present at swimming beaches can minimize this problem. You can help by not feeding ducks and geese at your local beach.

Another concern for swimmers at the beach is cyanobacteria, which can cause skin irritation and other health problems. Cyanobacteria blooms cause the water to appear greenish-blue, have floating globs or be covered by a layer of scum. When these conditions are present, swimmers, dogs and livestock should avoid going in the water. If you see cyanobacteria, please call and notify NHDES staff at (603) 419-9229. If NHDES identifies high levels of cyanobacteria at a beach or lake, an advisory is issued to let the public know of the potential health risk.