

NEWS RELEASE

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New Beach Sign Aims to Prevent Health Risks, Replace Routine Monitoring

NORTH BAY, ON – Residents and visitors to the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts can expect to see new signage at public beaches this summer to help them make an informed decision before entering the water. After an internal assessment, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (Health Unit) has shifted away from monthly beach water sampling of E. coli bacteria to communicating risk and protection factors on signage at public beaches.

"Water sampling provides a snapshot of bacteria levels at a single point in time, and by the time results are available several days later, the water conditions have changed," says Brent Allen, Acting Manager of the Health Unit's Environmental Health program. Allen explains that bacteria levels in beach water can change quickly due to factors such as heavy rainfall, strong winds, wave action, or droppings from ducks, geese and other birds. "The new signage provides guidance when and where people need it most, which we couldn't offer with monthly sampling."

Allen emphasizes that the overall health risk of swimming at a public beach in the Health Unit region is low and can be reduced even further when people take precautions before, during and after entering the water.

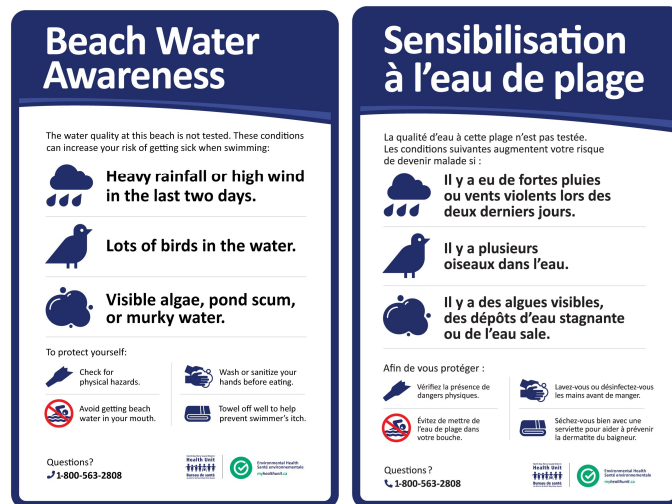
The new signs recommend beachgoers check the water for physical hazards, avoid getting beach water in the mouth, dry the body well with a towel after exiting the water, and wash or sanitize hands before eating.

There are approximately 60 public beaches across the Health Unit service area that meet the provincial definition of a public beach. The Health Unit is working with municipalities to post the new signs at all public beaches.

The Health Unit will continue to investigate public complaints and may collect water samples at public beaches when safety concerns are reported. In addition, communicating information on harmful blue-green algal blooms will continue.

Anyone with safety concerns pertaining to the water quality of a public beach is encouraged to contact the Health Unit's Environmental Health program at [1-800-563-2808](tel:1-800-563-2808) Ext. 5400.

For more information, visit myhealthunit.ca/beaches.



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Quick Facts

- The overall risk of getting sick from swimming at local beaches is low. When people do get ill, it is usually mild and only lasts a couple of days. The most common illnesses are:
 - minor skin infections
 - respiratory infections
 - gastrointestinal illness
 - ear or eye infections
- The risk of illness from a public beach is reduced if simple precautions are taken, such as:
 - not swallowing water while swimming
 - avoid swimming during or after heavy rainfall or high winds
 - avoid swimming when large numbers of birds are present
 - after swimming or playing in the sand, wash your hands before eating
 - avoid swimming with an open wound

- E. coli is a germ that is commonly found in the feces of humans and animals. It is naturally found at beaches, and higher numbers of bacteria are often found in water where there is untreated sewage, there are lots of birds, where there is stagnant water, or when the water or the sediment at the bottom of the lake or rivers is stirred up due to heavy rainfall or high wind.
- Individual samples are not an effective way to assess swimming safety.
- Signs are posted at public beaches, which are beaches that are owned or operated by a municipality and officially designated as public beaches.
- The Health Unit response to blue green algae at public beaches is not changing.

Media Inquiries

Kylie Wurdell, Public Relations Specialist
P: 705-474-1400, ext.5221 or 1-800-563-2808
E: communications@healthunit.ca