

Elbow River recreational water quality

Why is AHS warning the public about using the Elbow River for recreational activities?

In preparation for a busy summer season of recreation on Calgary's rivers, Alberta Health Services would like to inform the public of some common risks of using rivers for water contact activities such as swimming, wading, and rafting.

Is the Elbow River safe to swim in?

Water quality in the Elbow River often does not meet recreational water quality guidelines. The Elbow River is a shallow and slow moving river that runs through, and is influenced by, a dense urban area.

What's the source of water quality issues in the river?

Past monitoring has shown variable water quality during the summer. It is known that water quality can be influenced by a variety of factors including heavy rainfall, upstream sources such as agriculture, storm water discharges, groundwater, wildlife that live in the corridor, high river flows and recreational activities such as swimming and rafting. The past monitoring program has not identified a single specific source or spill that is the cause of poor water quality. AHS will continue working with the City of Calgary to monitor river quality. The 2019 monitoring program will continue to identify sources of potential contamination and address these sources where feasible.

Does this water quality issue affect a certain part of the Elbow River?

While this issue has been identified specifically in one section of the Elbow River in downtown Calgary (between Sandy Beach and 9 Ave. S.E.), AHS would like to advise the public that water quality can vary in all rivers, whether upstream or downstream from downtown Calgary.

Are there health risks associated with using rivers for recreational activities such as swimming, wading, and rafting?

Disease causing water-borne microorganisms, if present, can cause vomiting and/or diarrhea from ingestion of water. If members of the public do decide to access the river, they should take precautions to protect themselves. Precautions include:

- Never drinking river water.
- Avoiding face and mouth contact with river water to avoid incidental ingestion and contact with eyes and ears.
- Hand washing immediately after accessing the river, as that will help protect against indirect exposure from activities such as eating.

Injury can occur from items which may have been discarded in the river, such as broken glass bottles or sharp metal cans. Footwear should always be worn when entering the river. It is important to be aware of these risks, particularly during hot summer weather, when people are more likely to swim, wade and/or raft in the river.