

2019 Recreational Water Monitoring for Beach Operators

The May long weekend often means the beginning of the open water season at recreational areas throughout Alberta. Beach water sampling begins around this time to ensure the water is safe for public use.

Changes to the recreational water sampling program for the 2019 season:

1. *Enterococcus* bacteria will be used for assessing fecal contamination. High levels of this bacteria increases the chances that swimmers may become ill.
2. Fewer beaches will be sampled. Priority beaches have been selected for sampling if:
 - a. the beach has many users over the season, and
 - b. there is a history of poor water quality.

Samples will only be tested for these prioritized, selected beaches. Samples from other beaches will not be tested.

3. Beach operators are asked to collect samples this year, even if beach samples were collected by Alberta Health Services (AHS) staff last year.

Operators of the priority beaches will receive a letter asking them to submit weekly samples for *Enterococcus* and/or cyanobacteria (blue-green algae). This letter will include any site-specific requests and other important information.

All beach operators should continue to watch for signs of cyanobacterial (blue-green algal) blooms and report the presence of blooms to AHS, even if not sampling weekly. A Blue-Green Algae Reference Guide that includes pictures of blooms can be found in the “Frequently Asked Questions” document at www.ahs.ca/bga

Monitoring Activities at Beaches

The sampling season runs from May long weekend and ends September long weekend.

Public health inspectors will work with beach operators at each priority site to:

1. determine the types of samples requested for that site,
2. provide support on how to complete the monitoring activities, and
3. distribute sampling supplies.

A summary of routine monitoring activities is outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of Monitoring Activities

Tasks	Details
<i>Enterococcus</i> Sampling	Collection of either 3 grab samples or 1 composite sample (made up from 3 sites) along the length of the beach most often used by bathers. The distance between the samples varies with the length of the beach. If the beach is more than 100 meters long, consult your local public health inspector as additional sample sites may be needed.
Cyanobacteria Sampling	Collection of 10 water samples along the length of the beach that are mixed together (composite sample).
Photographs (cyanobacteria sampling only)	Photographs of the recreational site capture a visual record of the lake water at the time of sample collection.
Visual Check	All sites should be checked for signs of a cyanobacterial bloom. If you suspect a bloom is present, take photographs and contact your local public health inspector.
Administrative	Complete the requisition form(s) while at the beach or prior to submitting samples.

More information about sampling and shipping processes is available in these resources posted under the Beaches dropdown at www.ahs.ca/ephbusiness:

- [How to Collect a Grab *Enterococcus* Water Sample](#)
- [How to Collect a Composite *Enterococcus* Water Sample](#)
- [How to Collect Cyanobacteria Water Samples](#)

Communicating Sample Results

A public health inspector will share sample results with the beach operator regularly.

Enterococcus sample results are available about 2-3 days after collection.

Cyanobacteria sample results are available about 1-3 weeks after collection.

Issuing Water Quality Advisories

The public health inspector will contact the beach operator as soon as possible if beach sample results do not meet Alberta recreational water quality standards.

Before issuing an advisory, the public health inspector will consider:

- sample results,
- photographs,
- local conditions during sampling, and
- complaints or reports of cyanobacterial blooms.

If a water quality advisory is needed, the local public health inspector will notify the beach operator and any user groups affected (e.g. local municipalities, summer camps, campgrounds). Advisory signs will be posted at the beach or water body by either the public health inspector or the operator, and the advisory messaging will be posted on the [Active Health Advisories](#) section of the AHS website.

Advisories due to high *Enterococcus* levels remain in place until further acceptable sample results are received and the public health inspector approves removal of the health advisory signs.

Advisories for cyanobacteria remain in place until late autumn (typically November) as blooms can disappear and reappear throughout the warmer summer months.

Reporting an Adverse Event

Any contamination event or recreational water quality issues should be reported to AHS by contacting your local public health inspector or calling Health Link at 8-1-1. Examples include:

- Municipal sewage system discharging near a beach
- Chemical release near a beach
- [Cyanobacterial \(blue-green algae\) bloom](#)

For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.

Edmonton Main Office
Calgary Main Office
Lethbridge Main Office

780-735-1800 Grande Prairie Main Office
403-943-2288 Red Deer Main Office
403-388-6689 www.ahs.ca/eph

780-513-7517
403-356-6366

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