

# Oregon Beach Monitoring Program

## Frequently Asked Questions



### *Q: What is the Beach Monitoring Program?*

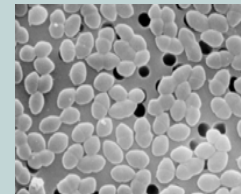
A: The Oregon Beach Monitoring Program (OBMP) monitors recreational water quality at ocean beaches. OBMP works with other state agencies to collect and test water samples, and when bacteria levels are above normal a water contact advisory is issued. The goal of the OBMP is to protect the public health by providing information about water quality, strengthening water quality standards at beaches, and promoting scientific research.

### *Q: How often is the ocean water tested?*

A: During the summer, ocean water is sampled either once a week, every two weeks, or monthly based on the priority ranking of the beach. The priority is determined by beach use, pollution hazards, previous monitoring results, and input from coastal stakeholders. When a sample exceeds the state standard a water contact advisory is issued and resampling occurs within 96 hours. During the winter, water is sampled every two weeks at the beaches that are used most for winter water recreation. No resampling is conducted during the winter.

### *Q: What do you test for in the water?*

A: Ocean water is sampled for a fecal bacterium called enterococcus. Enterococci are bacteria that are present in the intestinal tract of warm-blooded animals, including humans, and have been found to indicate the presence of other bacteria that can make you sick. Enterococcus itself can cause susceptible individuals to become sick, but is generally considered less harmful than other fecal bacteria. When the enterococcus level is above normal an advisory is issued.



Enterococcus  
CDC/Janice Carr

### *Q: How will I know if there is an advisory in effect?*

A: Information about advisories is released to the media (television, newspaper, radio) and to the local authorities. In addition, advisory information is posted on our website and advisory signs are posted at the beach that is affected.

**Q: What does it mean when a water contact advisory is issued?**

A: When an advisory is issued for a particular beach, water contact is discouraged. People should avoid any activities during which they might swallow water, such as swimming, surfing, diving, and kayaking. People should wash their hands thoroughly before eating if playing in or around water that has above normal bacteria levels. Pet owners are advised to keep their pets out of the water during an advisory to prevent them from drinking the water.

**Q: What could happen to me if I swim in water with elevated levels of bacteria?**

A: Exposure to bacteria in the water can cause symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea, stomach cramps, chills and fever. Skin rashes and infections of the eyes, ears, nose and throat may also occur. Children, the elderly, and individuals with weakened immune systems have a greater chance of getting sick when they come into contact with contaminated water. If you experience any of these symptoms, you should contact your physician.

**Q: Can I still go to the beach when there is an advisory?**

A: Absolutely! The OBMP does not close beaches and only issues water contact advisories. There are plenty of fun, healthy activities to do at the beach that don't involve water contact, such as walking and playing on the beach, flying kites, picnicking, visiting local shops, and much, much more.



**Q: Where does the contamination come from?**

A: Bacteria in coastal recreational waters can come from a variety of sources, both near the shore and inland. These sources include development, sewage treatment plants, septic tanks, storm water runoff, boating waste, humans, and animals. Elevated bacteria levels are often associated with rainstorms, and people are advised to avoid water contact for 48 hours following a heavy rain.

**Q: Where can I get more information about the program?**

A: Information is available on the DHS website at

**[www.healthoregon.org/beach](http://www.healthoregon.org/beach)**

or you can contact program staff at:

**Oregon Beach Monitoring Program  
800 NE Oregon St, Suite 608  
Portland, OR 97232  
503.731.4012**



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503.731.4012

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