

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

Only Public Beaches are tested each week in the Town of Dennis.

When a beach is closed by the Health Department, “Keep Out-water polluted” signs will be posed in conspicuous places on the beach, usually at the entrance to the beach as well as the lifeguard chair. The signs will not be removed until the beach is safe for swimming.

Lifeguards will not remain at a beach that has been closed for swimming.

All sample results are posted on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health website at www.mass.gov/dph/dphhome

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Health Department staff is available Monday through Friday from 8:30 am until 4:30 pm. Our phone number is 508-760-6158.

Visit the Town of Dennis website at www.town.dennis.ma.us for more contact options.

TOWN OF DENNIS HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Beach Water Quality Testing

Frequently Asked Questions



Dennis Health Department
465 Main Street
Dennisport, MA 02638
508-760-6158

WHY WE TEST THE WATER

We are required under State Law to test all public bathing beaches weekly during the bathing season. Testing the water ensures that we are doing what is necessary to protect public health.

WHAT DO WE TEST FOR?

Salt water beaches are tested for the presence of enterococci (fecal streptococci bacteria) and fresh water beaches are tested for escherichia coli (fecal coliform bacteria). Both of these bacterias are nonpathogenic and are considered indicator organisms. They are naturally found in the intestines of most healthy warm blooded animals, including humans.

WHAT IS AN INDICATOR ORGANISM?

Indicator organisms, as the name implies, are used to “indicate” the presence of conditions or organisms which have the potential to cause illness. The US Environmental Protection Agency and others, have conducted studies and have determined that certain levels of enterococci and fecal coliform in bathing beach waters indicate the potential presence of harmful pathogens.

IS THE WATER SAFE FOR SWIMMING?

If the laboratory determines that the indicator organism (bacteria) is above the required standard, set forth by State Law, the Board of Health must close the beach to bathing and swimming. The high levels of bacteria found indicate a potential health threat from other contaminants in the water.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I’VE BEEN IN THE WATER?

Swimming or playing in unsafe water may result in minor illnesses such as sore throats or diarrhea. It also might result in more serious illnesses that may last longer than your vacation at the beach! Children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems have a greater chance of getting sick when they come in contact with water containing high levels of bacteria. Mild flu-like symptoms and an increased likelihood of cuts becoming infected can result from swallowing or wading through unsafe water.

WHY DIDN’T YOU TELL ME SOONER?

The results of water quality testing are not available for 24 hours after sampling because of the method required for determining the results. The lab must incubate the sample for 24 hours to allow the bacteria to “grow”. The resulting colonies are counted by a microbiologist and the results are then relayed to the

Laboratory Director. The Laboratory Director contacts the Health Department immediately upon discovering a failed sample either via phone or fax. Health Department staff notifies the public of the closure as soon as possible, usually within one hour of the notification.

HOW LONG WILL THE BEACH BE CLOSED?

As soon as the Health Department is made aware that a Beach has failed its water quality analysis, the water is re-sampled and brought to the laboratory. The sample must incubate for 24 hours before it yields a result. The process will be repeated until a satisfactory result is found. Plan on the beach being closed for a minimum of 24 hours after the initial closure.

WHAT CAUSES THE BEACH TO HAVE TO CLOSE?

High bacteria levels in the waters of Dennis may be caused by many different things. Because most beach closures only last 24 hours, it is our belief that natural environmental conditions cause the high bacteria. Seaweed, marine animals, and birds are likely culprits. Also, road run-off from storm events, outfall pipes, and failing septic systems, and bather density may contribute as well.