

N.H. Beach Inspection Program

How often are public beaches inspected?

Both public coastal and freshwater beaches are monitored from approximately Memorial Day to Labor Day. Sixteen coastal beaches are inspected once or twice a week depending on visitor frequency. For example, the beach usage at Hampton Beach State Park warrants a higher monitoring frequency than some of the smaller and less visited coastal beaches. Over 160 inland freshwater beaches are sampled once per month. Local municipalities that have their own programs, such as Salem, Manchester, Laconia and Amherst, sample more frequently.

What happens during a beach inspection?

Water samples are collected from the designated beach area by program staff for bacteria analysis. The staff member records water temperature, weather conditions and the number of bathers, dogs and wildlife present. If needed, signs are provided to beach managers. If a cyanobacteria bloom is suspected, the inspector will collect a sample to be microscopically analyzed. Questions from the public are addressed and referred to other staff as necessary.

Who pays for the sampling? How much does it cost?

Since there are currently no available funds for freshwater sampling, the town/owner/association of a monitored freshwater beach is responsible for the cost. The cost of sampling a coastal beach is shared between the town and the Beach Program. The cost of bacteria analysis at the NHDES microbiology lab is currently \$30 per sample. It is important to note that costs accumulate if a beach area is posted for high bacteria levels and requires re-testing until state standards are met.

How many samples are taken per beach?

It is the intention of the Beach program to obtain a representative overview of the area since bacteria can be localized. Depending on the size of the beach, inspections can include two to five water samples. A designated beach area less than 100 feet in length requires only a left and right sample station, while a beach longer than 100 feet will be sampled at left, center and right stations. Beaches of greater than 2,000 feet may have additional sampling locations. Samples are collected at pre-determined stations and are identified in relation to facing the waterfront.

Is my beach being sampled? If not, how do I go about having it sampled?

If your beach is being sampled, it should have a green sign posted at the entrance stating that it is monitored by the NHDES Beach program. You can also contact the beach manager or town recreation department to inquire if it is being monitored. If you would like a beach to be sampled that is not already monitored by the program, contact the beach manager/owner/association for the particular beach or contact the NHDES Beach Program at (603) 271-0698 or beaches@des.nh.gov for information regarding funding and sampling.