



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Health Department to begin beach water quality testing Monday

**Eau Claire, May 16, 2024** – On Monday, May 20, the Health Department will kick off its yearly beach monitoring program, which starts in late May and ends around Labor Day.

Every year, Health Department microbiologists and other staff monitor seven local beaches for bacteria and harmful algae blooms throughout the summer. They collect water samples weekly from Riverview Park, Big Falls, Half Moon Lake, Lake Altoona, Lake Eau Claire, Coon Fork Beach, and Coon Fork Campground.

If our testing finds unsafe levels of bacteria or harmful algae, the beach may be closed or a water quality advisory sign may be posted.

### How can I find out if a beach is closed?

The Health Department tests beaches weekly and posts up-to-date information for each beach on our [beaches webpage](#), our [Facebook page](#) and our [Twitter page](#). We also send real-time email alerts Monday through Friday when beaches close or re-open. To start getting beach closure alerts, visit [bit.ly/beachalertsEC](http://bit.ly/beachalertsEC) and select Beach Closings.

“We test and monitor the water at county beaches to keep our community safe during the summer months. Harmful algae or bacteria in beach water can especially affect children, older adults, and pets,” says Health Department Chemist-Microbiologist Tristin Faust.

### What’s the difference between a beach closure and a water quality advisory?

A beach is closed if:

- Our testing shows that the level of *E. coli* bacteria is very high.
- If there’s an algae scum in a body of water, it’s more likely that harmful levels of toxins are also present.

A water quality advisory sign is posted if:

- Our testing or visual observation suggests an increased risk of algae toxins, but algae scum isn’t present in the water.

### Why shouldn’t people or pets swim/boat/wade/fish at beaches when they’re closed or have an advisory?

During a beach closure, the beach is closed for all recreation activities – stay out of the water! If you see a harmful algae bloom, don’t boat, kayak, swim, or water ski there. Avoid the area to prevent breathing in toxins from the air. Don’t wade or let pets swim in the water either.

During a water quality advisory, we still recommend you stay out of the water, and avoid swimming and boating in the affected area.

Contact with harmful algae can irritate the skin, eyes, nose, or throat. Swallowing water with harmful algae can cause nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting. If pets consume large amounts of water with harmful algae, they can become very ill or die.

Swallowing beach water with high levels of bacteria can cause flu-like symptoms, including diarrhea, nausea, fever, and abdominal cramping.

If you see signs of a [harmful algae bloom](#) at any Eau Claire County public beach, call us at 715-839-4718.

For more information about beach monitoring in Eau Claire County, visit [beaches.ehealthdepartment.org](http://beaches.ehealthdepartment.org).

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