

## **STRATFORD HEALTH DEPARTMENT BATHING WATER SAMPLING AND BEACH CLOSURE POLICY**

The Stratford Health Department conducts a seasonal bathing water sampling program and weekly inspections of the Short Beach and Long Beach facilities, including Marnick's Beach from Memorial Day through Labor Day of each year. Water samples are usually collected on Monday mornings by a sanitarian and submitted to the CT Department of Public Health for laboratory analysis. If elevated levels of bacteria are detected in the water samples an advisory is issued to warn beachgoers against entering the water, and swimming is prohibited until further testing indicates that the problem has been corrected. In addition to banning swimming when laboratory tests indicate unacceptably high bacteria counts, the Health Department introduced a policy several years ago whereby swimming is automatically prohibited for a minimum of 24 hours following a rainfall that exceeds 1 inch, and 48 hours or more following rainfall of 2 inches or greater.

The beach closure policy relative to precipitation is based on a rainfall survey that was conducted by the Health Department. Whenever rainfall exceeded a  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch, samples were collected from both Short Beach and Long Beach and submitted to the State laboratory for analysis. The enterococcal organism is the primary indicator used to evaluate the quality of bathing water in CT. The results of the rainfall survey indicated that bacterial counts typically surpass the action level for enterococci in bathing waters with 1 inch of rain or more, and remain elevated for approximately 24 hours following a rainfall that exceeds 1 inch. For more severe and prolonged rainstorms, it may take two days or more before the bacterial counts drop to a level that is acceptable for bathing. Many coastal towns have similar beach closure policies based on local surveys.

Stratford beachgoers are fortunate because the Town's public swimming areas are well protected from several influences that typically contribute to contamination of bathing waters. The Town does not have combined sewers, which can lead to a bypass of raw sewage into bathing waters. Moreover, there are very few homes with private subsurface sewage systems in the vicinity of Short Beach or Long Beach so the risk of contamination from a sewage system failure is minimal. The tidal current change also promotes rapid natural cleansing of the waters following extreme rainfall or other conditions that can cause excessive bacterial contamination.

Elevated bacterial levels in bathing water cause two health problems: skin irritations and gastrointestinal distress from ingesting contaminated water.

The public may still visit the shoreline and use the beach area for recreation when a swimming advisory is in effect. People simply cannot enter the water. Signs to this effect are prominently displayed at the entrance to the beach, and the swimming ban is enforced by the lifeguards.

The Health Department relies on rain gauge readings at the Water Pollution Control Facility to determine the level of rainfall. All plans for swimming advisories are coordinated with the Recreation Department. Recreation Department staff place and remove the no swimming signs at Short and Long Beach. The Health Department handles signage at either end of the seawall near Marnick's Restaurant.

Swimming is permitted following rainfall under 1 inch so the occurrence of rain alone will not necessarily result in a ban on swimming the following day. The public is advised to check with the Recreation Department at 385-4052, Monday through Saturday between the hours of 9:00 am -2:00 pm, to determine if a swimming advisory is in effect following a rainfall. The Health Department also responds to inquiries about swimming advisories during the normal Town workday, Monday - Friday. On Sundays, the public can call the Recreation Department's answering machine at 385-4129 for a taped message about beaches closures. Beach closures are also routinely publicized on the WICC radio station. In addition, the Health Department notifies private beach associations of swimming advisories so they can inform their members of the risk.

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