

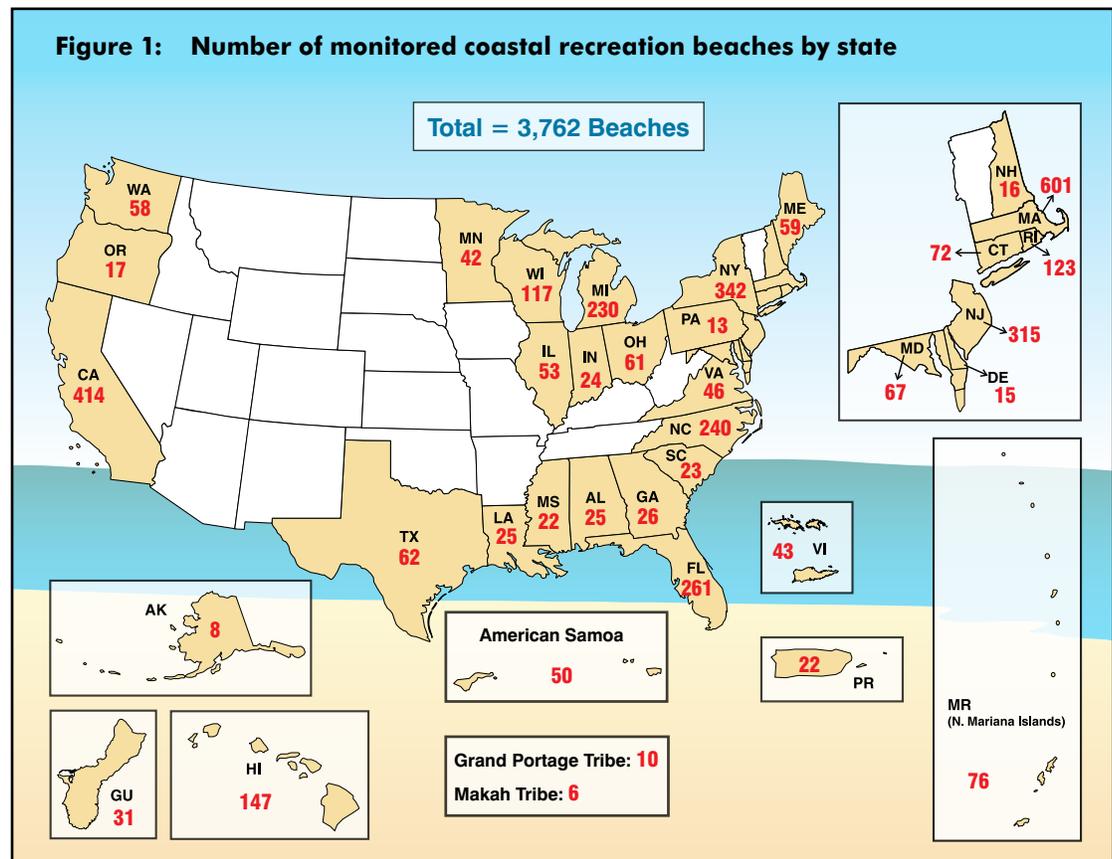
EPA's BEACH Report: 2012 Swimming Season

June 2013

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Introduction

The Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act of 2000 authorizes EPA to provide grants to coastal and Great Lakes states, territories, and eligible tribes to monitor their coastal beaches for bacteria that indicate the possible presence of disease-causing pathogens and to notify the public when there is a potential risk to public health. The BEACH Act requires that recipients of those grants report their coastal beach monitoring and notification data to EPA, and that EPA maintain an electronic database of that data, accessible to the public, so that they can make informed choices about where to swim. To support reducing the risk of exposure to disease-causing pathogens at recreational beaches, EPA is posting the latest data submitted to EPA about beach closings and advisories for the 2012 swimming season. This fact sheet also highlights recent developments in EPA's beach program.



2012 Swimming Season Results

When monitoring results at swimming beaches show that levels of specific indicator bacteria in the water exceed applicable water quality standards, states, territories, and tribes issue a beach advisory, warning people of possible risks of swimming; or close the beach to public swimming until further monitoring finds that water quality complies with applicable standards. Some states and local agencies, in addition to water sampling, use models or other predictive tools as a basis for issuing notification actions at beaches.

How many beaches had notification actions?

In 2012 of the 3,762 coastal beaches that were monitored (Figure 1), 1,504 (40 percent) had at least one advisory or closure (Figure 2). This is about a 3 percent decrease from the 2011 swimming season. One reason for the decrease was that Hawaii did not issue as many rainfall-based advisories in 2012 as they did in 2011 (72 in 2012, 264 in 2011). In addition, New York and Connecticut issued fewer advisories as compared to 2011, the year of Hurricane Irene's landfall.

How many notification actions were issued and how long did they last?

A total of 5,725 notification actions (i.e., advisories or closings) were issued by states, territories, and tribes during the 2012 swimming season. Typically an action is lifted when follow-up monitoring proves that water quality complies with applicable standards. For the majority of cases in 2012 (66 percent) water quality returned to normal and beaches were deemed safe for swimming within one or two days (Figure 3). Only rarely (13 percent) did notification actions last more than a week.

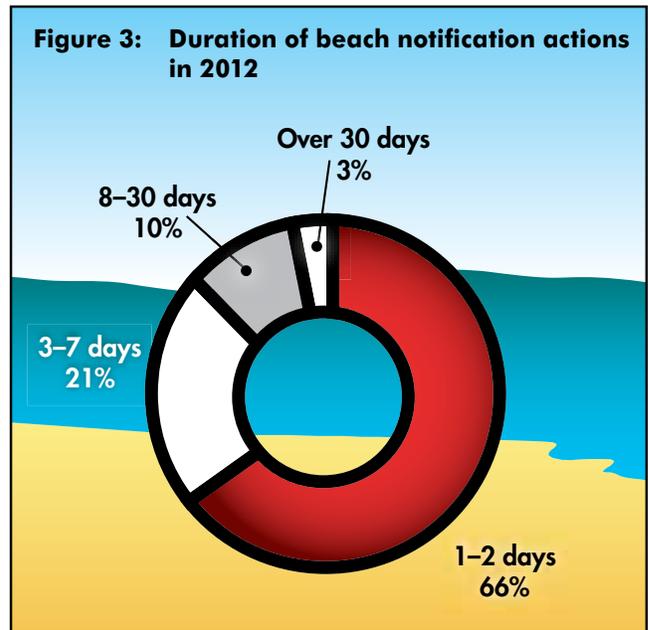
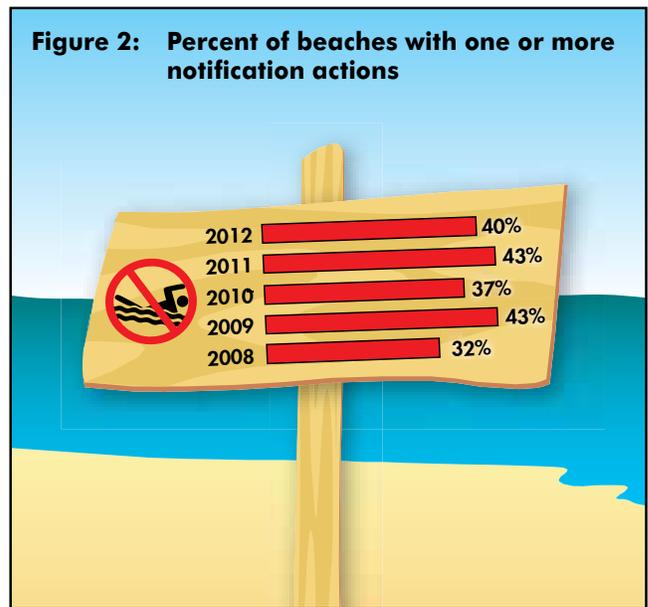


Table 1. Data collected on beaches, advisories, and closings

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of monitored beaches	3,786	3,782	3,654	3,650	3,762
Number of beaches affected by advisories or closings	1,208	1,616	1,362	1,575	1,504

Figure 4: Percent of beach days open and safe for swimming



What percentage of days were beaches under a notification action?

EPA calculates the total available beach days and the number of beach days with advisories or closings to better track trends over time. To calculate total available beach days, we multiply the length of each state's and territory's beach season by the number of beaches in the state or territory. For 2012 EPA determined that 695,527 beach days were associated with the swimming seasons of 3,762 monitored beaches. Notification actions were reported on 31,163 days, meaning that beaches were under an advisory or closed about 4.5 percent of the time, consistent with the past several years (Figure 4).

Protecting your local beaches

Beach advisories and closings can result from a number of sources: overflows from sewer systems, either by design or due to blockages; treatment plant malfunctions; stormwater runoff after rainfall; waste from boats; leaking septic systems; or pet and wildlife waste. To help minimize the

risk to beachgoers, EPA is helping communities build and properly operate sewage treatment plants, working to control overflows to reduce them as much as possible, and working with the U.S. Coast Guard to reduce discharges from boats and larger ships. To find out more about what you can do to help, visit: <http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/dosdents.cfm#protect>. To find out more about sources of beach pollution in your area, contact your local beach program: http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/whereyoulive_state.cfm.

Recent Developments in EPA's Beach Program

EPA Improved Access to Online Beach Monitoring and Notification Data (BEACON)

Clean Water Act section 406(e) requires EPA to make available a national database that contains state reported beach monitoring and notification data. In 2003 EPA created the BEACON (BEach Advisory and Closing Online Notification) system to meet the Agency's BEACH Act requirements. EPA upgraded the BEACON system in 2012 to use state-of-the-art map navigation and report display tools. Maps are dynamically produced and show the location of more than 6,000 beaches and the related water quality monitoring stations on road or satellite base maps. Reports can combine both notification data and water quality monitoring data, and new state data can be displayed every 2 hours. <http://watersgeo.epa.gov/beamon2/>.

2012 Recreational Water Quality Criteria

EPA has released its final 2012 Recreational Water Quality Criteria. The Agency's new criteria reflect the latest scientific knowledge, public comments, and external peer review. They are designed to protect the public from exposure to harmful levels of pathogens while participating in water-contact activities such as swimming, wading, and surfing in all waters designated for such recreational uses. For more information about the criteria, including the research EPA conducted, visit: <http://water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/standards/criteria/health/recreation/index.cfm>.

National List of Beaches

EPA updated and improved the National List of Beaches on its website. The BEACH Act requires EPA to periodically identify and publish a list of discrete coastal recreation waters adjacent to beaches or similar points of access that are used by the public. The Agency must also identify whether there is a monitoring and notification program for each beach.

EPA first published the National List of Beaches in 2004, with updates in 2008 and 2010. The National List of Beaches contains beaches identified by the states, tribes and territories ("state") under the BEACH Act in U.S. coastal and Great Lake waters. The list does not include beaches on inland waters because they are not subject to the BEACH Act.

The National Lists of Beaches for the 2004, 2008, and 2010 swimming seasons are static pdf files, organized by state and county. For some territories and Hawaii, the beaches are listed by island.

Alaska's beaches are reported by community. Beach names are listed with their monitoring status for the selected swimming season.

The improved list is available in a dynamic format that links to EPA's Beach Advisory and Closing On-line Notification (BEACON) system where further details about each beach can also be found. The list contains the most recent information reported to EPA by coastal and Great Lakes states and can be found at:

http://ofmpub.epa.gov/apex/beamcon2/f?p=BEACON2:12:10838337754900::NO::P12_YEARS:Current.

For More Information

For general information about beaches visit:

http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/beaches_index.cfm.

For information about a specific beach visit:

<http://watersgeo.epa.gov/beamcon2/>.