



INFORMATION BULLETIN

# EPA BEACH REPORT SWIM ADVISORIES – GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILS

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This publication provides bayside councils with information on EPA Victoria Beach Report swim advisories. It includes background on EPA’s recreational water quality triggers, EPA response when trigger levels are exceeded, swim advisory signage and communication, and assistance that EPA may request from councils. This information can serve as a reference for council environmental health officers and council staff over the Beach Report season.

## BEACH REPORT – BEACH WATER QUALITY TRIGGER LEVELS AND EPA RESPONSE

EPA has been monitoring recreational beach water quality for nearly 10 years as part of the Beach Report program. Beach Report runs over the summer period and focuses primarily on the daily forecasting of bacterial water quality, supported by weekly enterococci monitoring at 36 beaches around Port Phillip Bay. Enterococci is a group of bacteria found in the intestinal tract of warm-blooded animals and is used as an indicator of possible faecal pollution.

Short-term bacterial water quality is assessed by comparing weekly enterococci results against EPA’s recreational water quality triggers. If a trigger is exceeded, EPA will investigate. If there are repeated, high enterococci results, EPA will issue a swim advisory. The table below provides more information on EPA’s recreational water quality trigger levels and response.

**Table 1: EPA beach water quality triggers and EPA response**

EPA recreational water quality triggers	Enterococci (org/100 mL)	EPA response to triggers
One sample internal trigger	>200, after dry weather	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review observation notes.</li> <li>2. Resample.</li> <li>3. Consider the need for a sanitary inspection or additional sampling adjacent to potential faecal sources (if no obvious source identified).</li> </ol>
Two consecutive sample trigger	>400	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review observation notes.</li> <li>2. Resample.</li> <li>3. Consider the need for a sanitary inspection or additional sampling adjacent to potential faecal sources (if no obvious source identified).</li> <li>4. Issue swim advisory.</li> </ol>
One sample impact indicator trigger	>1000, after dry weather	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review observation notes.</li> <li>2. Resample.</li> <li>3. Consider the need for a sanitary inspection or additional sampling adjacent to potential faecal sources.</li> <li>4. Issue swim advisory.</li> </ol>

## SWIM ADVISORIES – WARNING SIGNS

### Notification

If a swim advisory is required, the relevant council contact will be notified by phone. EPA will then issue a media release.

### Warning signs

When EPA issues a swim advisory, we request that councils place at the beach warning signs that include the following information and symbol:



EPA Victoria advises against swimming at this beach. Faecal contamination has been recorded here and swimming poses an unacceptable risk of illness. EPA Victoria and [your council] are investigating and will remove this sign when the water quality is suitable for swimming.

[Council contact number can be included]

Note: the symbol has been sourced from *Aquatic and Recreational Signage Style Guide* (Life Saving Victoria, 2004). An electronic copy of the symbol can be sourced from the Beach Report Service Coordinator.

### Format

The minimum size is A3. They do not need to be permanent signs. A laminated A3 colour printout is sufficient.

### Placement of signs

Signs should be placed at beach access points and/or in a visible position on the beach for 250 m either side of the sampling location. A minimum of three signs should be erected. If the area already has permanent signs warning against swimming, no additional signs are required. Please inform the Beach Report Service Coordinator once the warning signs have been placed at the beach.

### Removing the swimming advisory signs

When the results of resampling show that the beach is acceptable for swimming, the affected council will be contacted immediately. The signs can then be removed.

### Council assistance that may be requested during EPA investigations

Below is an outline of how EPA investigates high bacterial levels that result in a swim advisory. Resampling at the routine sampling site until enterococci levels return below water quality triggers is not included, as it is an automatic requirement when a trigger is exceeded. Sections of the investigation plan for which EPA may request assistance from a council are highlighted in red. The investigation plan below will vary between beach investigations, depending on whether reports of spills/discharges are received by EPA, council or a water authority, and whether a sanitary inspection needs to be conducted for a beach.

### Investigation plan for high bacterial results during dry weather

#### Desktop investigation

- Check Bureau of Meteorology website for recent rain, wind conditions and air temperature.
- Check with EPA's Pollution Response unit for reports of pollution.
- **Contact local council and water authority to check for any catchment issues.**
- Check sanitary inspection form for potential faecal contamination sources and their assessed risk.



### Site investigation

- Field inspection –
  - Check for evidence of discharge from stormwater drains – discoloured water or plumes visible, surface scum, odour at the routine sampling site and nearby drains.
  - Check creeks and all stormwater drains along the beach for evidence of discharge or high flows.
  - Determine if beach cleaning has recently taken place.
  - Identify and check other potential sources of contamination – public toilets (e.g. odour, blocked toilets), presence of bird roosting areas and accumulation of seaweed, bather and dog numbers.
  - Conduct sanitary inspection to assess high-risk potential faecal contamination sources at the beach.
- Collect at each site –
  - enterococci sample at routine sampling location and adjacent to nearby, high-risk stormwater drains (as assessed by sanitary inspection).
  - enterococci samples from creek mouths, public toilets, bird roosting areas or seaweed as necessary, if no obvious source is identified through the field inspection.
  - sediment samples from submerged, wet and dry sand at the routine or other sample sites if bather shedding, bird roosting or seaweed are considered to be plausible causes.

After each investigation, a plausible-cause assessment will be prepared by EPA, in consultation with the council, with the final assessment sent to the council environmental health officer.

## COMMUNICATION TO MEDIA AND BAYSIDE COUNCILS

### Media

An EPA media release is sent out to the media when a swim advisory is issued (Figure 1). The affected council is notified when a media release has been sent out to the media.

**WATER QUALITY UNACCEPTABLE**

EPA Victoria's water quality testing has shown unacceptable water quality due to elevated bacterial levels at <insert name> beach.

As a result of these levels, EPA advises against swimming at this beach until further notice.

The water has been resampled and the information will be updated once results are received.

To check the water quality of your beach go to [www.epabeachreport.com.au](http://www.epabeachreport.com.au)

**Figure 1. Template beach advisory issued to media**

For EPA responses to media enquiries, a set of core messages are used for all beaches in the bay (Figure 2). Core messages focus on informing the public of potential causes of high bacteria levels and warn against swimming in turbid water after rain. If there are potential causes of high bacteria levels at a beach that are not covered by the core messages, EPA will discuss with the relevant council the most appropriate messaging to be used.

**Core messages**

**High bacteria levels linked with rainfall**

The latest available results indicate that the majority of beaches were within the guideline levels for all parameters, except for bacterial levels at <insert name> beach. The elevated enterococci result at <insert name> was likely to be linked with recent rain.

As a general precaution, EPA Victoria advises people not to swim near stormwater drains, rivers, streams and other outlets into the Bay during and for at least 24 hours after rainfall.

**High bacterial levels during dry weather**

The latest available results indicate that the majority of beaches were within the guideline levels for all parameters, except for bacterial levels at <insert name> beach. EPA is investigating the possible causes for this elevated enterococci result.

As a general precaution, EPA Victoria advises people not to swim near stormwater drains, rivers, streams and other outlets into the Bay during and for at least 24 hours after rainfall.

**Figure 2: Core messages used for EPA-generated media releases and EPA responses to media enquiries**

**Bayside councils**

In the pre-Beach Report stakeholder workshop, councils will be provided information on the template EPA swim advisory media release and core messages used in other EPA-generated media releases and responses to media enquiries.

**BEACH SAMPLING LOCATIONS**

**Table 2: Location of sampling sites**

Sample Site	Beach name or bay location in Melways	Sample site	Beach name in Melways
Portsea	Located at Woomera Bay	Half Moon Bay	Near Half Moon Bay Life Saving Club
Sorrento	Sorrento Front beach	Sandringham	Near Sandringham Life Saving Club
Blairgowrie	Near St Johns Wood Road	Hampton	Near Hampton Life Saving Club
Rye	Near Rye Yacht club	Brighton	Near Green Point
Rosebud	Near Rosebud Pier	Elwood	Elwood beach
Dromana	Near Dromana Pier	St Kilda	St Kilda beach
Safety Beach	Safety Beach	Middle Park	North of St Kilda Pier
Mt. Martha	Mt. Martha Beach South	Port Melbourne	Near Port Melbourne Yacht Club
Mornington	Shire Hall beach	Sandridge	Sandridge beach
Canadian Bay	Near Canadian Bay Boat Club	Williamstown	Located off the Esplanade
Frankston Coast Guard	Near Frankston Pier	Altona	Altona beach
Frankston Life Saving Club	Long Island beach	Werribee South	Near Werribee River mouth
Seaford	Near Seaford Life Saving Club	St Helens	St Helens jetty
Carrum	Near Progress Avenue	Eastern	Near Eastern beach car park
Aspendale North	South of Mordialloc Creek mouth	'The Dell', Clifton Springs	Near 'The Dell' picnic area
Mordialloc	Near Mordialloc Life Saving Club	Portarlington	Near Portarlington Jetty
Mentone	Near Mentone Life Saving Club	St Leonards	Near St Leonards pier
Beaumaris	Near Beaumaris Life Saving Club	Queenscliff	Near Citizens Park



## EPA BEACH REPORT SERVICE COORDINATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Service Coordinator - Beach Report

Tel: 9695 2722

Email: [beach.report@epa.vic.gov.au](mailto:beach.report@epa.vic.gov.au) (between December and Labour weekend in March only).

### Further information

For further information on the Beach Report program and a summary of summer water quality refer to the annual Beach Report environment report on the EPA website ([www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au)).