



Ottawa RIVERKEEPER®  
SENTINELLE Outaouais

# SWIM GUIDE

Sometimes, beaches are closed due to high *E. coli* levels. You can stay safe by following swim advisories and using our Swim Guide app to stay informed on conditions at your beaches.



Photo: M Brown

*Swim advisories are common occurrences along the Ottawa River at more than 60 public beaches.*

Clean beaches are important to us. We go to beaches to cool off on hot summer days and connect with friends and family. We are lucky to have public beaches open most of the swimming season, however beaches close when *E. coli* levels are unsafe for swimming. *E. coli* levels are usually highest after it rains, when sewage seeps into the river. In Ottawa alone, there are 16 sewage overflow sites along the Ottawa River, many located near public beaches.

Because of the importance of beaches, Waterkeeper Alliance has a free swim guide app for iPhone, Android, or web use. The app uses water quality data of almost all official beaches in Canada, including those along the Ottawa River. Ottawa Riverkeeper updates data daily to let you know if your local beach is safe for swimming on any given day.

**You can help** by downloading the swim guide app and sharing information in your community. By staying informed on beach conditions, you can help protect yourself against exposure to contaminated water. Check out our other fact sheets to learn about what you can do to reduce pollution in the river and keep our river swimmable!

## Did you know?

The city of Ottawa tests beaches for contamination every day while Gatineau only samples beaches once every week or two.

*Defending the Ottawa River. Protecting our Communities.*

*À la défense de la rivière des Outaouais. Pour la protection de nos communautés.*





**2006**

Petrie Island was closed for 45 consecutive days as nearly a billion litres of raw sewage spilled into the river.



**2011**

Parc Moussette was closed for 57% of the season due to high *E. coli* levels.



**2013**

*E. coli* counts reached 10 times the limit at Westboro beach on 3 separate occasions during the swimming season.



### What is *E. coli*?

*E. coli* is a bacteria that originates in the intestines, typically associated with animal and human fecal matter. When testing waters, *E. coli* is used as an indicator for harmful pathogens such as *Salmonella* and *Giardia* that pose a health risk to humans.

### What are the health risks?

Swimming in contaminated water poses several health risks. Mild exposure can cause fever, headaches, skin infections, diarrhea, nausea, and muscles aches. Exposure to severely polluted water can even cause liver infection, hepatitis, respiratory infections, and hearing loss.

### When do beaches close?

In Ontario and Quebec, beaches are closed when *E. coli* levels exceed 200 cfu/100mL (colony forming units). Typically *E. coli* levels are highest after a heavy rainfall.

## What can you do?

Reduce your risk of exposure and help keep beaches clean by following these steps:

**1**

Check the status of your local beach before a swim by visiting the Waterkeeper Swim Guide at [www.theswimguide.org](http://www.theswimguide.org) or download the free Swim Guide app for your smartphone.

**2**

Avoid swimming 48 hours after it rains since contamination is usually highest after a heavy rainfall.

**3**

Avoid swimming if you are sick or have an infection or open wound.

**4**

Notify a municipal authority if you become sick due to polluted water.

**5**

Avoid feeding birds since they also contribute to fecal contamination on beaches.

