



FACT SHEET

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SWIMMING IN SURFACE WATERS

The rivers and streams of Grey Bruce are as safe for swimming as anywhere else in Ontario. However, as in any rural area with similar livestock density and towns nearby, the rivers and streams throughout Grey Bruce are subject to contamination. Caution must be taken when swimming in any surface waters. Contamination can come from:

- Commercial and industrial discharge.
- Agricultural and runoff from manure piles, field tile drains, livestock feedlots, livestock access to streams, milk house wash water, pesticides and fertilizers.
- Faulty private septic systems.
- Municipal sewage treatment plants with combined sewer overflows and storm water runoffs. When rainfall is heavy and the treatment plants are at capacity, excess flows are discharged directly to lakes and rivers without proper treatment.
- Heavy rainfall that contaminates surface water with feces from deer, birds, cats, dogs and other animals.
- Flocks of geese, gulls and other waterfowl.
- Winds, currents and waves that stir up bottom sediment of lakes and streams (turbidity).
- Numerous bathers, particularly those with infections.
- Oil and gas spills from power boats and waste from boaters.

People who swim in surface waters are more likely to get sick than people who swim in chlorinated swimming pools. Swallowing water is the main way contaminants enter the body. They may also gain entry through broken skin or through the eyes, ears and nose. The most common illnesses that result are minor respiratory, skin, eye, ear, nose and throat infections as well gastrointestinal such as diarrhea.

How can you prevent illnesses when swimming in surface waters? Consider these precautions:

1. Be your own monitor. Water that is safe one minute may be unsafe the next.
2. Do not swim following periods of heavy rainfall or large waves.
3. Avoid swimming in areas close to livestock, storm culverts, field tile drains, or industrial runoff.
4. If the water is not clear or has an odour, do not go swimming.
5. Do not swim if you have an infection or open wounds.
6. Avoid putting your head under water if you are susceptible to eye, ear, nose or throat infections.
7. If you are taking your infant swimming, consider using a chlorinated swimming pool instead of surface waters.
8. Avoid warm, shallow pools of water that are not replenished by a flow of fresh water. Such pools are good breeding grounds for bacteria.
9. Use your best judgment when swimming at a monitored beach. Weather, environmental, animal or human factors can contaminate water shortly after routine water tests show the beach to be safe.

Please see our website for the latest water conditions during the swimming season, or call for further information.