



WHAT CAUSES BEACH CLOSURES IN MILWAUKEE?

Public health officials use beach advisories and closings to let people know when the water may be unsafe for swimming and in-water recreation. The beaches located along Lake Michigan within the Area of Concern boundary close periodically due to high [*E. coli*](#) counts, which indicate a possible health-risk to those recreating in the water.

Photo (right): Bradford Beach. Credit: Sigma Group, Inc.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE CLOSURES AND MAKE BEACHES SAFER FOR SWIMMING?

Beach advisories and closures in Milwaukee typically occur because of elevated *E. coli* levels. *E. coli* serves as an indicator of the possible presence of other health risks in the water, such as bacteria, viruses, and other organisms. Some ways to address high *E. coli* levels are:

- Reminding people not to feed gulls and other waterfowl near swim areas. Feeding birds encourages them to hang out at the beach too, which increases the risk of fecal matter in swim areas.
- Discouraging gulls and other waterfowl from congregating in swim areas.
- Adding green infrastructure and native landscaping to hold and filter runoff water, which helps keep pollutants from entering surface water.
- Keeping the beach clean by locating trash bins away from swimming areas and properly disposing of all trash.
- Locating swim areas where water circulates easily. Structures in the water, such as breakwaters, prevent the natural exchange of nearshore water with cleaner water farther away from shore— this can prevent contamination from diluting and moving away from shore.
- Locating swim areas away from roads, parking lots, and other areas where pollution can be carried with runoff water when it rains. If beaches are near parking lots, grade and construct them to reduce runoff.
- Adding coarse sand to the beach and contouring the slope of the beach to allow water to soak in better and prevent stagnant water from ponding on the beach.





BRADFORD

One of Wisconsin's first beaches to receive Blue Wave Certification from the Clean Beaches Council.



SOUTH SHORE

One of the most frequently closed beaches in the Great Lakes due to high bacteria levels.



MCKINLEY

Milwaukee County commissioned a study of beach conditions and is evaluating solutions to keep people safe.

WHAT WORK IS PLANNED FOR BEACHES IN THE MILWAUKEE AREA OF CONCERN?

To address beach closings and recreational restrictions, a combination of beach improvement projects at South Shore, Mckinley, and Bradford Beaches and best management practices, have been identified for listed project sites and Bay View Beach.

What work is planned for South Shore Beach?

South Shore Beach is frequently closed due to high *E. coli* levels. The existing plan is to move the swimming area to a nearby location along the shoreline that has less pollution, better water circulation, and significantly lower *E. coli* concentrations. For more information on the South Shore project, please see [this FAQ](#).

What beach improvement projects and best management practices (BMPs) are recommended for the other beaches?

The McLellan Laboratory at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee School of Freshwater Sciences has been assessing Milwaukee beaches since 2000. In 2020, they were funded to analyze new and archived samples to help characterize bacterial pollution at Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern beaches and to recommend actions and best management practices to keep beaches open for more of the swimming season. The study found that when *E. coli* counts are high at beaches, seagull waste is the primary source of pollution at most of Milwaukee's Area of Concern beaches. Thus, days with advisory *E. coli* levels can be reduced by implementing best management practices:





- **Bradford Beach Improvements and BMPs:** Rain garden restoration to help filter contaminants and reduce runoff discharge across the beach; adding sand to reduce standing water at the beach; BMPs also include routine removal of *Cladophora* algae.
- **McKinley Beach Improvements and BMPs:** gull deterrent systems installed on rip rap seawall surrounding the swimming area; Additional BMPs include sand grooming to limit the establishment of *E. coli* reservoirs; and routine removal of *Cladophora* algae. *Note: McKinley Beach is closed due to dangerous rip currents; Milwaukee County Parks recently conducted a Beach Safety Study which identified measures necessary to improve swim safety and beach sustainability, for McKinley. A resolution was passed in June 2022 to fund safety improvements identified in the study.*
- **Bay View Beach BMPs:** gull abatement.
- **Recommendations for All Beaches:** Clear Safety Signage and seasonal *E. Coli* monitoring.

WHERE DO I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

For additional information on beaches, including closures, advisories, and further details on monitoring, please visit the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) [beach website](#).

If you would like to request additional information on beach improvement work in the Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern, reach out to any of the following contacts.

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Swimmable Beaches



**WATERWAY
RESTORATION
PARTNERSHIP**
MILWAUKEE ESTUARY AREA OF CONCERN

South Shore Beach Rehabilitation

EXISTING BEACH REDESIGNED



RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE

