

Frequently Asked Ramsey County Beach Water Monitoring Questions:

Question 1 Are the lakes safe to swim in?

Generally lakes are safe to swim in, although accidental drownings and waterborne illness are always a concern. The risk of drowning is reduced by staffing beaches with lifeguards or posting when there are no lifeguards on duty. Lakes are also sampled weekly to ensure that the water meets the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) proposal for water bacteria levels.

Question 2 What do we look for when we sample?

The most current EPA recommendations for beach water sampling are to test for the presence of *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). *E. coli* is one of the intestinal organisms found in warm blooded animal waste. It is therefore a good indicator of fecal contamination.

Question 3 Why are swimming beaches sometimes closed?

Several factors can cause bacterial levels to increase, which can result in a beach closing. Some of the reasons for increased bacterial levels may be swimmer load and swimmer practices; high water temperature, bird droppings, animal wastes, rainfall and low water levels. When lab results indicate increased levels of bacteria, such as *E. coli*, the county staff has to determine what measures need to be taken to protect the public health. These measures may include more frequent testing, removing waterfowl, educating users on personal hygienic practices at the beach, and removing geese.

Question 4 When do you open the swimming beach once it is closed?

Ramsey County officials will reopen the closed beach when *E. coli* levels fall below the proposed MPCA water bacteria acceptable ranges. In late summer during low water levels and high temperatures, bacterial levels may remain above acceptable levels for a prolonged period of time. This sometimes causes such beaches to remain closed longer than when the water temperature is cooler or if the water levels are higher. Ramsey County officials will open the beach as soon as it is safe to do so, but always keeping the public's health in mind.

Question 5 Can you eat the fish?

Yes, fish is normally safe if it is cooked.

Question 6 How harmful are *E. coli* bacteria?

Some strains of *E. coli* can make people sick if ingested with water at swimming facilities. In general, however, the *E. coli* test is used as an indication that some harmful organisms may be present at a swimming facility.