

Bathing Beach FAQs

Why is Lake Massapoag Tested?

The lake is tested to protect public health. The samples that are collected are then analyzed for “indicator” organisms. Indicator organisms are not harmful, but indicate the POTENTIAL for the presence of human pathogens. A human pathogen is an organism or a virus that can cause illness in people.

What are indicator organisms?

Indicator organisms indicate the presence of conditions which potentially can cause illness in people. It has been established through the EPA that certain levels of indicator organisms in recreational bathing waters represent a threat to public health. E. Coli is the indicator organism used in freshwater beaches, such as Lake Massapoag.

Indicator organisms alone may not be harmful. Rather, since these organisms are found in the intestines of warm blooded animals (and people) their presence of these indicator organisms suggests that other harmful viruses and organisms (referred to as pathogens) may be present. If swimmers accidentally swallow water with these pathogens, recreational water illnesses may occur. The most common illness is a gastroenteritis, whoever these can be problematic to immuno-compromised people.

How do these organisms and pathogens get into the lake water?

Runoff from rainfall is the most common cause for elevated indicator organisms. Runoff carries pollutants from roads and other paved surfaces directly into the lake. Animal waste from pets and wild animals also contribute to the addition of these organisms and pathogens. Waste on the lake can be from dogs, fox, ducks, geese etc. These animals carry the same indicator bacterium used to classify (and close) the lake.

Why does the Lake get Posted?

When a sample is taken at Lake Massapoag the water is brought back to a lab and tested for E. Coli. It takes 24 hours to determine if E. Coli is in the sample. The maximum allowable E. coli colony forming units allowed per 100ml sample is 235. If a sample exceeds this limit the beach must be posted as closed to swimming, and resampled.

Geometric Mean is kept at all bathing beach sites. This is a running average and is calculated using the most recent 5 NON storm event samples in the bathing season. This running average must not exceed 126 E. coli per 100 ml sample.

How long is the Lake Posted if high levels of E. Coli are detected?

In the event that a sample has bacteria levels above the standard listed, a resample of the bathing water will be conducted as soon as possible and the beach will be reopened when test results show acceptable bacteria levels. Generally the levels of the E. Coli are reduced within 24 hours of the conclusion of the rainfall. However; the 24 hour incubation period remains for that resample to be tested. Because of this it is common for bathing beaches to be closed for a day or two to ensure public health and safety.

Is there anything I can do to help keep Lake Massapoag from being Posted?

Do not feed the birds.

Do not bring your pets to the beach from April 15th to October 15th.

Do not bury diapers or trash in the sand

Carry in- carry out. Remove your trash from the lake.