

King's Beach water rated least safe in the region

King's Beach, which spans the border of Lynn and Swampscott, had the worst water-safety rating in the region in 2022, according to the Metropolitan Beaches Water Quality Report Card.

Compiled by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, the annual report card grades the safety of public beaches in Boston and its surrounding municipalities.

From 2017 to 2021, King's Beach's annual rating dropped from 92% to 68%. Until 2022, the beach consistently had the second-worst water-safety rating in the region, with Dorchester's Tenean Beach graded at 63% in 2021, and King's Beach at 68%.

In 2022, King's Beach's rating fell below Tenean's for the first time, although both beaches saw increased water-safety ratings. Tenean's rating rose by 24%, earning it an 89% water-safety rating in the recently-released report card, and King's Beach's rating increased by 6% to 74% — now the lowest in the region.

“Most of the region's beaches scored quite well in 2022,” Save the Harbor/Save the Bay Executive Director Chris Mancini said. “We are pleased to see improvement at Tenean Beach, and are hopeful that Lynn and Swampscott's ongoing efforts to address persistent pollution at Stacey's Brook will improve water quality at King's Beach.”

King's Beach is frequently polluted with sewage-mixed groundwater discharge from a drain pipe at Stacey's Brook. In February, the King's Beach Steering Committee, which comprises representatives from the Town of Swampscott, the City of Lynn, regulatory agencies, public-interest groups, and consultants, sent a letter to the state Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Rebecca Tepper requesting \$25 million to disinfect the beach with UV rays.

The letter states that the contaminated runoff spews a quantity of bacteria into the beach that is approximately 800 times greater than the level deemed safe for swimming.

“Even with successful elimination efforts, the UV solution would be necessary to address polluted runoff and keep King's Beach open and swimmable for longer periods of time,” the Steering Committee wrote.

Currently, Department of Conservation and Recreation beach managers are required to fly a red flag on days when bacteria levels render the water unsafe for swimming. Mancini said that while the water tests themselves are “extremely accurate,” it takes roughly 24 hours for them to be completed and posted.



Seagulls take flight over water draining from Stacey's Brook at King's Beach along the Lynn/Swampscott line. The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) recently confirmed the presence of the COVID-19 virus in untreated sewage that had possibly drained onto the beach. (Spenser Hasak)

As a result, Mancini said flags are always a day late and do not reflect a beach's current condition.

The state Department of Public Health is currently working to redesign its water-safety website to allow multilingual access to the most current water-quality test results and historic water-quality data for every beach in the Commonwealth. The site will provide members of the public with the information they need to make informed decisions about when and where to swim.

“With support from both U.S. EPA and the Commonwealth, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health has been able to modernize our public-health data systems for reporting the water quality at the more than 550 marine and over 500 freshwater beaches across the state,” Public Health Commissioner Robbie Goldstein wrote in a statement.

Until the site is completed, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay urges the public to stay out of the water for 24 hours, or approximately two tide cycles, after summer storms.

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