

Arianna MacNeill | July 14, 2021

Nearly half of Mass. beaches tested had at least one potentially ‘unsafe day’ due to fecal bacteria, report shows



In this file photo, a seagull takes off from the shores of King's Beach in Lynn. Tamir Kalifa for The Boston Globe

A recently released report indicates that during 2020, of hundreds of Massachusetts beaches tested, nearly half of them were considered unsafe for at least one day.

The report, released by Environment Massachusetts, says that 556 Massachusetts salt-water beaches were tested for fecal contamination, and 264 of them had at least one “unsafe day.” Of those, 29 beaches were found potentially unsafe due to fecal contamination at least 25 percent of the time.

But the report isn't all doom and gloom for those who appreciate a dip in the ocean along Massachusetts's rocky coastline during the summer months. The

beaches' results were measured against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Beach Action Value, which the agency says should be used “as a conservative, precautionary tool for making beach notification decisions,” the report says.

As for the testing itself, if multiple tests were taken at a beach on the same day and one showed unsafe levels of fecal contamination, the day was thought to be unsafe, according to the report's methodology.

“It is misleading to release a report which includes beaches like M Street Beach in South Boston, which has failed just one test in five years along side beaches like King's Beach in Lynn and

Swampscott or Tenean Beach in Dorchester that were unsafe for swimming more than one out of every five days in 2020,” Chris Mancini, Save The Harbor/Save The Bay executive director, told State House News Service.

The beaches thought to have the most unsafe days were King's Beach in Essex County — the report notes that it had more than one testing site, which could have affected the results — with potentially 65 unsafe days, Tenean Beach in Suffolk County with 29 possibly unsafe days, Wollaston Beach at Channing Street with 23 days, Wollaston Beach at Milton Street with 19, and Wollaston Beach at Rice Road with 16. All of these beaches underwent testing on 85 days, the report says.

“We are particularly concerned about the situation at King's Beach, where filthy, bacteria laden discharges from both Lynn and Swampscott at Stacey Brook continue to threaten public health,” Mancini told the news service.