

G. Michael Dobbs | July 27, 2021

## Thinking about boating or swimming? Check the water quality

WESTERN MASS. – Are you looking for a place for boating or swimming this summer? You may want to check the quality of the water before making any plans.

Environment Massachusetts released a national report on the cleanliness of water at ocean beaches and the results generally are the further away a person gets from a large city the cleaner the water will be.

The report notes, “In 2020, 556 beaches were tested for fecal indicator bacteria in Massachusetts. At 264 of those beaches, testing found potentially unsafe water on at least one day, and 29 beaches were potentially unsafe on at least 25 percent of the days they were tested. King’s Beach in Essex County tested as potentially unsafe for 64 days, more days than any other beach in the state, and 75 percent of the days that sampling took place. In Norfolk County, the average beach was potentially unsafe for swimming on 12 percent of the days that sampling took place, a higher percentage than any other county in the state.

Colin A. Young of the State House News Service said the findings of the report are controversial as the environmental organization Save The Harbor/Save the Bay disputed the report. “Though it makes a good headline, it is hyperbolic to suggest that swimming on 264 out of 457 beaches in Massachusetts poses a threat to human health because they may have failed one water quality test in 2020 after a summer rain,” [Save The Harbor/Save the Bay] Executive Director Chris Mancini said. “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.”

The Environmental Massachusetts noted there were 250 beaches tested in Barnstable County on Cape Cod and of these the average percentage of days with potentially unsafe water was six percent.

The full report can be seen at [https://environmentmassachusetts.org/sites/environment/files/reports/SafeForSwimming-21/MAE\\_Beaches\\_Report\\_Jun21.pdf](https://environmentmassachusetts.org/sites/environment/files/reports/SafeForSwimming-21/MAE_Beaches_Report_Jun21.pdf).

Here in Western Massachusetts, the Connecticut River is a major destination and the Connecticut River Conservatory operates a testing program that measures on a monthly basis the status of the river and other waterways.

The monitoring for E.coli bacteria is done on many locations on the river on a monthly basis. The website for the groups offers the advice to be aware the bacteria count is higher after a rain and that people considering using the river should:

- Avoid contact with the river downstream of a sewage outfall.
- Cover all open cuts, use ear and nose plugs.
- Wash hands before eating or drinking.

Currently locations listed as “not clean for boating or swimming:”

- Cooley Brook at Laurel Park, Longmeadow
- Connecticut River at the Pioneer Valley Yacht Club
- Connecticut River at Pynchon Point Park, Agawam
- Connecticut River at North Riverfront Park, Springfield
- Abby Brook, Front Street, Chicopee
- Davitt Bridge, Chicopee
- Connecticut River at the Medina Street Boat Ramp, Chicopee
- Connecticut River at Brunelle’s Marina, South Hadley
- Mill River at Mill Site Road, Amherst
- Fort River at Groff Park, Amherst;

Safe for boating only:

- Manhan River at Dwyer Conservation area, Easthampton
- Connecticut River at Sunderland Boat Ramp, Sunderland

Safe for swimming and boating:

- Connecticut River at Jones Ferry Road Access Boat Launch, Holyoke
- Connecticut River at Berchulski Fisherman Access
- Connecticut River at the Oxbow, Easthampton
- Lower Millpond, Millside Park, Easthampton
- Connecticut River at the Northampton DCR/UMass Boat Dock, Hadley
- Lake Warner Road Boat Ramp, Hadley

To check your area, go to [www.connecticutriver.us/it-clean](http://www.connecticutriver.us/it-clean).