

October 2, 2025

Mayor Sherry Bondy
Town of Essex
33 Talbot Street South
Essex, ON N8M 1A8
sbondy@essex.ca

Re: Beach Closures in the Municipality of the Town of Essex

Dear Mayor Bondy,

We are writing in response to your letter dated September 16, 2025. Below, you will find answers to your questions, as requested. We hope that these responses will help clarify any points of uncertainty. More information can be found on the WECHU website, by visiting <https://www.wechu.org/your-environment/beaches>.

In addition to answering the questions you have posed, we want to highlight for you some recent WECHU Board of Health Information Reports in the area of safe recreational water. In February 2025, the WECHU provided an information report on [Beach Water Monitoring Program Enhancements 2025](#) and in May 2025, we provided the [2025 Beach Water Monitoring Program Information Report](#). Both reports provide key information about the program and continuous improvements we are making in regards to community water safety and awareness.

The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit conducts beach water sampling in accordance with [Recreational Water Protocol, 2019](#) and following the [Operational Approaches for Recreational Water Guideline, 2018](#). The goal of the program is to prevent the incidence of water-borne illnesses and injuries related to recreational water use, and to mitigate risk by preventing the use of public beaches under adverse conditions.

Beaches are monitored to protect swimmers from illnesses that may be linked to high bacteria levels. Swimming in water with high E. coli bacteria levels can result in an increased risk of infection of the ears, eyes, nose and throat or stomach illnesses. To determine the water quality, the WECHU staff collect water samples weekly at eight local beaches. The samples are then sent to Public Health Ontario Laboratory in London for testing to determine the levels of E. coli bacteria present. It takes at least 24-48 hours for water quality results to be made available online. In Ontario, the recreational water quality guideline is a maximum of 1000 E. coli per 100 mL of water which poses significant health risk to the public. Public beaches must post a closure sign if the beach results show higher than acceptable levels of E. coli bacteria. When the weekly test results are received, the WECHU notifies municipalities of the

results and the required action related to beach operations. The municipality is then responsible for ensuring the proper posting at the beaches within their jurisdiction until the next testing cycle. The posting status for each beach reflects the conditions at the time of the assessment only. Water quality can change from day to day or even hour by hour depending on the weather and other conditions (e.g., bird count, bather load etc.).

To address limitations with the current structure and capacity for testing, the WECHU introduced a Predictive Beach Model for the 2025 season that uses current weather conditions, environmental factors such as rainfall, temperature, water turbidity and past beach data to predict future water quality results for public beaches. The predictive model provides community access to timely estimations of what the water quality results may be. These models can be used to supplement weekly beach monitoring and enable prompt public notification due to changing conditions.

For information on the results from the 2025 Beach Water Testing and Predictive Modeling program please visit the WECHU website: <https://www.wechu.org/beaches/beach-water-testing>

It is important to note that weekly routine beach water sampling results take precedence over predictive modeling results and will determine beach closures. If bacterial count warrants closing the beach, modeling results will be displayed as "Beach Closed".

1. How beach sampling data collection is performed by the WECHU in the Town of Essex, including the frequency of collection;

Each year during the warmer months (June – September), Public Health Inspectors perform a weekly beach safety assessment and water quality assessment at eight local public beaches. Water samples are tested for E. coli bacterial counts.

2. How the WECHU determines whether or not to close a beach in the County of Essex;

E.coli is measured in Coliform Units per 100 mL of water (CFU/100mL)

- *200 or less E.coli CFU/100mL = Beach is open - Bacterial levels are below provincial standards.*
- *Between 201- 999 E.coli CFU/100mL = Beach Warning - Unsafe for swimming - High levels of bacteria in these waters may pose a risk to your health.*
- *Above 1000 CFU/100mL = Beach is Closed - Unsafe for swimming - High levels of bacteria in these waters may pose a risk to your health.*

- Ontario Public Health Standards which outlines the details in the Recreational Water Protocol and the Operational Approaches for Recreational Water Guidelines – all based on the water quality standards set in Health Canada’s Canadian Recreational Water Quality Guidelines

Water quality can change from day to day depending on the weather conditions and lake levels. Although the beach might be open, we recommend not swimming if there was a recent heavy rainfall (at least 48 hours), if the water is cloudy, or if you are unable to see your feet when in the water.

3. How the WECHU determines the duration for which it will close down a beach;

The testing is weekly, so the results are in place for one week.

4. When and why the WECHU closes down beaches in the Town of Essex;

E.coli is measured in Coliform Units per 100 mL of water (CFU/100mL)

- 200 or less *E.coli* CFU/100mL = Beach is open - Bacterial levels are below provincial standards.
- Between 201- 999 *E.coli* CFU/100mL = Beach Warning - Unsafe for swimming - High levels of bacteria in these waters may pose a risk to your health.
- Above 1000 CFU/100mL = Beach is Closed - Unsafe for swimming - High levels of bacteria in these waters may pose a risk to your health.

5. Specifics as to why beaches have been closed in the Town of Essex during the summer of 2025 and how the duration of such closures were determined; and

<https://www.wechu.org/beaches/beach-water-testing>

Testing Result Action Summary:

- 200 or less *E.coli* CFU/100mL = Beach is open - Bacterial levels are below provincial standards.
- Between 201- 999 *E.coli* CFU/100mL = Beach Warning - Unsafe for swimming - High levels of bacteria in these waters may pose a risk to your health.
- Above 1000 CFU/100mL = Beach is Closed - Unsafe for swimming - High levels of bacteria in these waters may pose a risk to your health.

6. Ways in which the Town of Essex can reduce the number of beach closures in the municipality and generally improve the water quality.

Bacteria levels elevate with an increase in rain and with the strength of the wind blowing onto the shore. Rainwater washes fecal material from cats, dogs, birds, and other wildlife into storm sewers which flow directly into nearby rivers and lakes.

How Can Water Pollution Be Reduced by encouraging residents to:

- *Always pick up your animal's waste. Pet waste is a major source of bacteria in water.*
- *Don't use soap in the beach water as it feeds the algae and bacteria.*
- *Don't litter. Throw your waste in the receptacles.*
- *Dispose of human waste in a sanitary manner.*
- *Do not feed or leave out food to attract animals or birds as they leave droppings.*
- *Do not go in the water if you have an infection or an open wound.*
- *Ensure your septic system is in good working order.*


In agricultural areas:

- *Fence animals away from streams and give them other sources of water.*
- *Ensure feedlot and manure pile runoff is properly contained.*

Sincerely,



Dr. Ken Blanchette
Chief Executive Officer



Kristy McBeth
Senior Director, Public Health Programs