

EPA's BEACH Report:

Massachusetts 2011 Swimming Season

August 2012

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Introduction

The Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act of 2000 authorizes EPA to provide grants to coastal and Great Lakes states, territories, and eligible tribes to monitor their coastal beaches for bacteria that indicate the possible presence of disease-causing pathogens and to notify the public when there is a potential risk to public health. The BEACH Act requires that recipients of those grants report their coastal beach monitoring and notification data to EPA. This fact sheet highlights the data submitted to EPA by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the 2011 swimming season.

2011 Swimming Season Monitoring and Notification Actions

Massachusetts monitored 599 coastal beaches in eight counties during the 2011 swimming season (Figure 1 and Table 1). When monitoring results at swimming beaches show that levels of specific indicator bacteria in the water exceed applicable water quality standards, Massachusetts officials issue a beach advisory, warning people of possible risks of swimming or close the beach to public swimming until further monitoring finds that water quality complies with applicable standards. In some cases, advisories and closings are issued preemptively (i.e., without having actual bacteria monitoring results) due to storms or other conditions that might affect swimmer safety.

How many beaches had notification actions?

In 2011, of the 599 coastal beaches that Massachusetts monitored, 213 (36 percent) had

Figure 1. Massachusetts coastal counties.

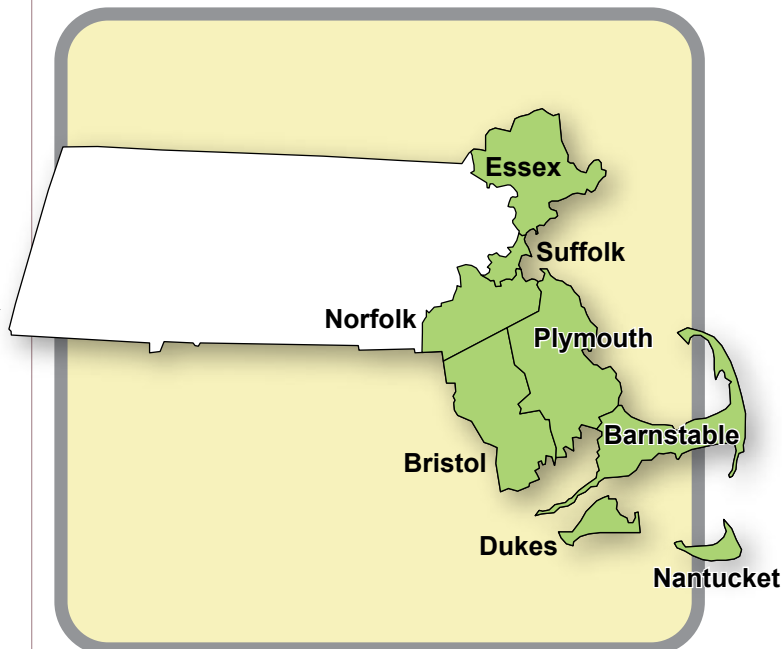


Table 1. Number of monitored and unmonitored coastal beaches by county for 2011.

County	Total Beaches	Monitored	Not Monitored
BARNSTABLE	265	265	0
BRISTOL	44	44	0
DUKES	48	48	0
ESSEX	89	89	0
NANTUCKET	18	18	0
NORFOLK	24	24	0
PLYMOUTH	87	87	0
SUFFOLK	24	24	0
TOTALS	599	599	0

Figure 2: Percent of beaches with one or more notification actions

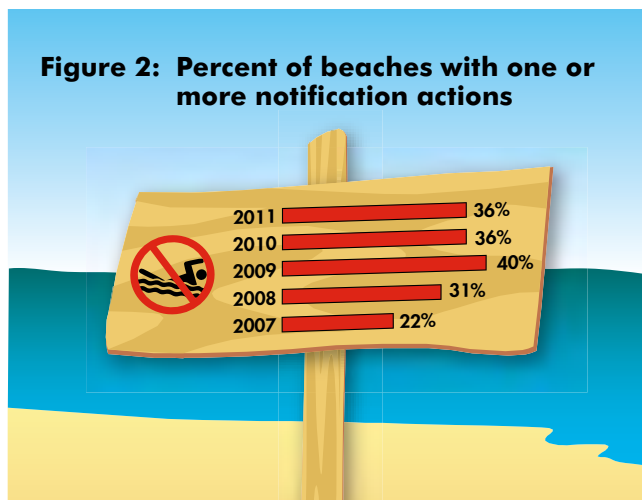
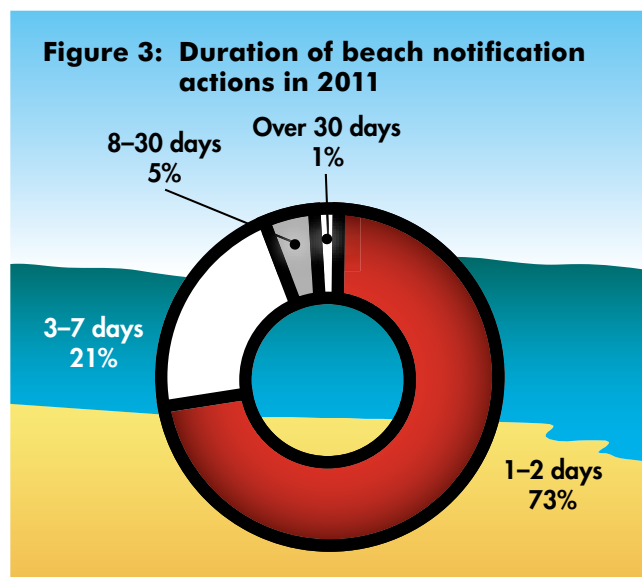


Figure 3: Duration of beach notification actions in 2011



at least one notification action (Figure 2). This is approximately the same as in previous years.

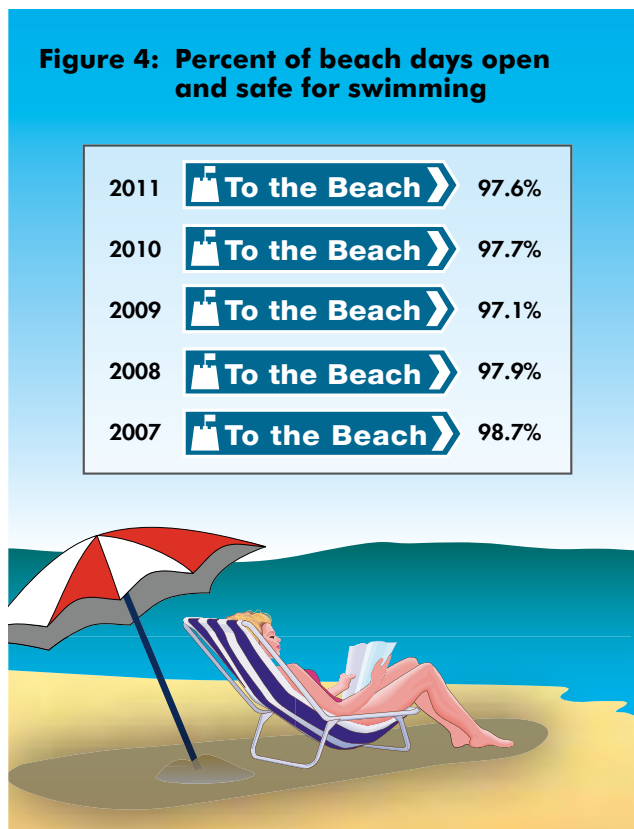
How many notification actions were issued and how long did they last?

Massachusetts issued 483 notification actions during the 2011 swimming season. Typically Massachusetts lifts an action when follow-up monitoring indicates that water quality complies with applicable standards. For the majority of actions (73 percent) water quality returned to normal and beaches were deemed safe for swimming within one or two days (Figure 3). Only rarely (6 percent) did notification actions last more than a week.

What percentage of days were beaches under a notification action?

EPA calculates the total available beach days and the number of beach days with notification actions

Figure 4: Percent of beach days open and safe for swimming



to better track trends over time. Total available beach days are determined by multiplying the length of the beach season by the number of beaches in the state. For 2011 EPA calculated that 63,494 beach days were associated with the swimming seasons of the 599 monitored Massachusetts beaches. Massachusetts reported notification actions on 1,549 days, meaning that beaches were open and safe for swimming about 98 percent of the time. This continues the trend of consistently high percentages of open beach days at state beaches (Figure 4).

For More Information

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For general information about beaches visit:

<http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/>.

For information about a specific beach visit:

<http://watersgeo.epa.gov/beacon2/>.