

New Jersey's Old Rules Can Make You Sick

Seven Simple Ways to Save Swimmers from Sewage

- 1. Two Days too Late:** The old rules require **two days** of consecutive samples exceeding allowable levels of fecal contamination, potentially exposing the public to unsafe water.
*Recommendation: **At minimum a beach must be posted with a health advisory after one sampling day of high results to be consistent with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines and other state programs and be more protective of public health. Better yet, close the beach.***
- 2. Open and Shut Case:** Under the old rules, contaminated bathing beaches with high fecal contamination are **not** closed or posted if they are not officially “opened” (meaning no lifeguard on duty).
*Recommendation: **To protect public health, issue advisories and closures at any beach sampled that indicates contamination.***
- 3. All Sites are Swimmable:** Under the old rules, “environmental sample stations” are not considered official bathing beaches and, therefore, are not posted even if high fecal bacteria levels occur, nor are these beaches re-sampled. The public frequently uses any of these beaches.
*Recommendation: **Close or issue advisories at these stations when results indicate high levels. Resample if necessary.***
- 4. Swimmable Even Without the Beach:** There are no public health rules for highly used recreation waters even though some limited data are collected that could provide guidance. In popular areas such as Barnegat Bay, Raritan Bay, and Navesink and Shrewsbury Rivers, as well as Great Egg and Great Bay Harbors people become fully emerged in water while swimming off boats, wind surfing, water skiing, or sailing small boats that often flip.
*Recommendation: **Establish rules for these waters, make data publically available, and increase testing.***
- 5. Open Season for Our Waters:** The old rules ignore off-season beach use for water activities such as surfing and windsurfing.
*Recommendation: **Efforts should be made to work with surfers and windsurfers to identify high use areas for year round testing.***
- 6. The Right to Know:** The old rules do not *require* public notification or communication other than closures at the open designated beaches. Fortunately for now, the County Health Departments and NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) voluntarily post results on-line for public access although the data is limited, complex, and confusing for citizens to use and is often delayed.
*Recommendation: **Better communication is needed to inform the public in a timely manner. It must be streamlined to ensure swift data input by county and local health departments. Notification should be required for distribution to the media. More information on what the health risks are should also be communicated on the website.***
- 7. Know on Day One:** The old rules rely on old testing methods that take 24 hours to produce results. The NJDEP and the EPA have been researching rapid methods over the last few years that can produce results in 4 hours.
*Recommendation: **Prepare for rule changes to allow for the adoption of rapid testing methods as soon as possible. In the meantime, target high density beaches and beaches with known problems and conduct a pilot project using the rapid methods that provide same day results.***