

Recreational water quality

2023-24



Helping people know where it's safe to swim

Summer is a great time to hit the water in Hawke's Bay, but how do you know if your local beach or river is suitable for swimming?

To help people make informed decisions about where they choose to swim, the Regional Council monitors popular recreational areas weekly throughout summer. Results can be found at hbrc.govt.nz, search: #swim and at lawa.org.nz/explore-data/swimming

Water quality at Hawke's Bay beaches tends to be good and exceedances of guidelines are short-lived. Our rivers and streams can be more affected by rain, which may flush animal waste and surface contaminants into them. Lagoons and coastal streams can have poorer water quality as they are at the end of the catchment, and generally have warm, slower moving waters.

This summer showed overall improvements in water quality on the year prior as the region recovers from the effects of Cyclone Gabrielle. This was most prominent in our freshwater swim sites that were suitable for swimming 80% of the time, up from 77% in 2022-2023.



Quick facts

37 sites are monitored weekly or fortnightly through summer

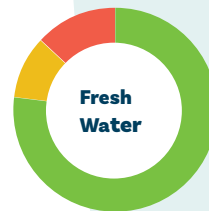
A total of **680** samples were taken between November 2023 and April 2024

Sites were suitable for swimming **80%** of the time

Caution was advised **7%** of the time

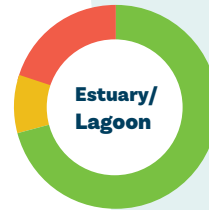
Sites were unsuitable for swimming **13%** of the time

Suitability for contact recreation for the past 5 years (2019 - 2024).



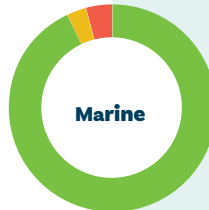
80% suitable for swimming
8% caution advised
12% unsuitable for swimming

11 sites monitored: 1039 times over 5 years



68% suitable for swimming
12% caution advised
20% unsuitable for swimming

11 sites monitored: 944 times over 5 years



93% suitable for swimming
3% caution advised
4% unsuitable for swimming

15 sites monitored: 1227 times over 5 years

What we measure

Bacteria – The bacteria enterococci (for marine waters) and Escherichia coli (in freshwaters) are measured to provide information on whether other pathogens (viral and bacterial) are likely to be present. The levels are then compared to national guidelines to determine whether a site is ‘suitable for swimming’, ‘caution advised’ or ‘unsuitable for swimming’.

Faecal Coliforms – Popular shellfish collection sites are analysed for faecal coliform indicators. These are used to determine the risk to the public from the consumption of shellfish. This can inform the public of the sites that persistently fail, and where shellfish collection should be avoided.



Long term compliance with Shellfish Gathering Guidelines (2009–2024 – NT = Not Tested)

Shellfish compliance	Mahia Beach at Golf Club	Maungawhio Lagoon	Te Mahia at Boat ramp	Waipatiki at South end	Ahuriri Estuary	Te Awanga Beach	Kairākau Beach	Pōrangahau Estuary
2009/2010	Yes	NT	NT	Yes	No	No	No	NT
2010/2011	No	NT	No	No	No	No	Yes	NT
2011/2012	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	NT
2012/2013	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
2013/2014	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
2014/2015	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
2015/2016	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
2016/2017	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
2017/2018	Yes	No	No	NT	No	NT	Yes	No
2018/2019	NT	No	No	No	No	NT	No	No
2019/2020	NT	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
2020/2021	NT	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
2021/2022	NT	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
2022/2023	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
2023/2024	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Compliance	10/11	0/13	0/14	6/14	3/15	1/13	9/15	0/12
% Compliance	91%	0%	0%	43%	20%	8%	60%	0%

What happens next?

Case study: Faecal Source Tracking

If a site regularly exceeds the water quality guidelines for safe swimming, Regional Council undertakes faecal source tracking to help identify what type of animals (humans, cows, sheep, birds, or dogs), may be causing the high levels of bacteria in the water. Identifying the sources helps to manage the problem and try to improve water quality.

In the 2023/2024 season, faecal source tracking was undertaken for Nuhaka River. The overall faecal source was found to be a mixture of ruminant and avian (birds).

Rule of Toes!

If it's been raining heavily, our best advice is to stay out of the water for three days. A handy guide is if you can't see your toes when standing knee-deep in water, then water quality is not the best for a swim.



Find out more

The purpose of Hawke's Bay Regional Council's State of the Environment report is to:

- Report on issues that affect our shared environment
- Help councils and communities set priorities for environment management
- Monitor the effectiveness of how we manage the environment
- Provide information people can use in their decision-making

This report card is part of a series prepared by Hawke's Bay Regional Council. It outlines the high-level results from the Regional Council's monitoring programme. For more details, including full technical reports and up to the minute monitoring results visit hbrc.govt.nz