

# The Maine Healthy Beaches Program

## What is the Maine Healthy Beaches (MHB) Program?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) initiated the Beaches Environmental Assessment, Closure and Health (BEACH) Act of 2000 in response to the growing concern about public health risks posed by polluted coastal bathing beaches. The Maine Healthy (Coastal) Beaches Program is taking a leading role in this initiative. Efforts include public education and outreach, systematic measurement of critical factors affecting the health of our beaches and the people who visit them, and working with towns to identify sources of pollution.

Maine municipalities, state parks and community-based groups are taking water samples at coastal swim beaches for *Enterococci* bacteria, an indicator of recreational water-borne illnesses. The data are used by municipalities, state agencies and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in their efforts to promote public safety.

The MHB Program ensures healthy, informed opportunities for swimming and other recreational water activities along the coast of Maine. Monitoring coastal water quality for swimming and other water contact usage is the responsibility of the local jurisdiction. It is not a mandated requirement from the State, nor does the State of Maine monitor public beaches other than those of their ownership.

## How is the program being implemented in Maine?

### What are the major goals?

In Maine, the MHB Program has established a statewide structure to unify, standardize and implement quality assured monitoring and notification protocols. Steps have been taken to establish an effective procedure for monitoring the water quality of Maine's coastal swim beaches, which include:

- Gathering extensive information from participating municipalities and state beaches
- Surveying beach users to establish the extent of public knowledge and incidence of health problems related to swimming in coastal areas
- Developing monitoring methods, regional laboratories and training programs
- Developing and providing public education and outreach
- Developing and implementing a notification program

All these efforts are in progress and have met with great success due to the willingness on the part of the town and state park officials, staff and local volunteers to actively participate in this program. We are fortunate in Maine to have a cadre of citizen volunteers and town/state park staff who are well informed and trained. Currently, we have 21 towns/state parks representing 43 beach management areas participating in the program.

### **How is the water tested for the MHB Program?**

For the MHB Program, the indicator organism *Enterococci* is tested by the EPA approved method: the "Enterolert" product, using Quantitray Most Probable Number (MPN) technology.

Monitoring of coastal beach sites are conducted weekly for most beaches. Testing protocols include measuring air and water temperatures, salinity, tide stage, and recording present weather conditions and any other observations that might relate to water quality (e.g. flooding, seals on rocks, oil on surface of water, rotten egg odor, etc.). Using sample tongs, water samples for bacterial examination are collected in sterile plastic bags (such as Whirlpak bags) or sterile bottles, and protected against contamination at all times. Bags are labeled and stored in a cooler at 4-10° C. Samples must be analyzed within 6 hours of being collected (**Section 4**).

### **Education and Outreach**

- ✓ The goal of this effort is to employ marketing expertise to inform visitors to Maine beaches of the monitoring program, risks of water borne illness, and the measures to ensure a safe experience in the form of written and visual materials. The educational materials have been developed to convey potentially distressing information that doesn't create a reactionary response that might deter visitors. Representatives of the MHB Program Advisory Board, State Park managers, and the town officials have guided the development of the materials (**Section 7**).
- ✓ The resources we developed for a more general audience are both informative and at times humorous (See MHB Poster and public service announcements **Appendix D**). The companion flyer placed adjacent to the poster (See brochure **Appendix D**) provides more in-depth information about what you can do to make certain "our" beaches are safe places to recreate. Other important items we have developed are a website [www.mainehealthybeaches.org/](http://www.mainehealthybeaches.org/), and signage (Open, Advisory, Closed) at the beach (**Appendix G**).
- ✓ The MHB Program offers the public opportunities to become involved in many aspects of the program. Members of the public have been engaged in, and continue to be involved in the design, implementation, and

evaluation of the program. In developing the resources we have solicited public feedback.

### **Who is involved?**

There are many participants at the local and state levels. The MHB Program is a joint effort of the:

- ✧ University of Maine Cooperative Extension/Maine Sea Grant
- ✧ Maine Department of Environmental Protection
- ✧ Maine State Planning Office/Coastal Program
- ✧ Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
- ✧ Municipalities and State Parks
- ✧ Community Volunteers
- ✧ US Environmental Protection Agency

The statewide advisory committee includes the following organizations:

- ✧ University of Maine Cooperative Extension/Maine Sea Grant
- ✧ Maine Department of Environmental Protection
- ✧ Maine State Planning Office/Coastal Program
- ✧ Maine Department of Health and Human Services
- ✧ Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
- ✧ Maine State Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory
- ✧ Maine Geological Survey
- ✧ Maine Department of Marine Resources
- ✧ Maine Department of Conservation
- ✧ Maine Department of Agriculture
- ✧ Mount Desert Island Water Quality Coalition
- ✧ Maine Surfrider
- ✧ Casco Bay Estuary Project
- ✧ Portland Water District
- ✧ US Environmental Protection Agency

### **Contacts for the Maine Healthy Beaches Program:**

Keri Lindberg, Program Coordinator  
University of Maine Cooperative Extension and Maine Sea Grant  
377 Manktown Road  
Waldoboro, ME 04572  
Phone: (207) 832-0343 or (800) 244-2104  
FAX: (207) 832-0377  
Email: [klindberg@umext.maine.edu](mailto:klindberg@umext.maine.edu)

Mark Margerum, Program Manager  
Maine Department of Environmental Protection  
17 State House Station

Augusta, ME 04333  
Phone: (207) 287-7842  
Email: [Mark.T.Margerum@maine.gov](mailto:Mark.T.Margerum@maine.gov)

Ms. Nancy Beardsley  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
Maine Department of Health and Human Services  
286 Water Street  
State House Station 11  
Augusta, ME 04333-0011  
Phone: 207-287-8016  
Email: [nancy.beardsley@maine.gov](mailto:nancy.beardsley@maine.gov)

Diane Gould  
US EPA New England  
One Congress Street, Suite 1100 (CWQ)  
Boston, MA 02114-2023  
Phone: (617) 918-1569  
Fax: (617) 918-0626  
Email: [gould.diane@epa.gov](mailto:gould.diane@epa.gov)