

EPA's BEACH Report:

Massachusetts 2012 Swimming Season

September 2013

EPA 820-F-13-033

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 2012 swimming season.

2012 Swimming Season Monitoring and Notification Actions

Massachusetts monitored 601 coastal beaches in eight counties during the 2012 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.

Figure 1. Massachusetts coastal counties

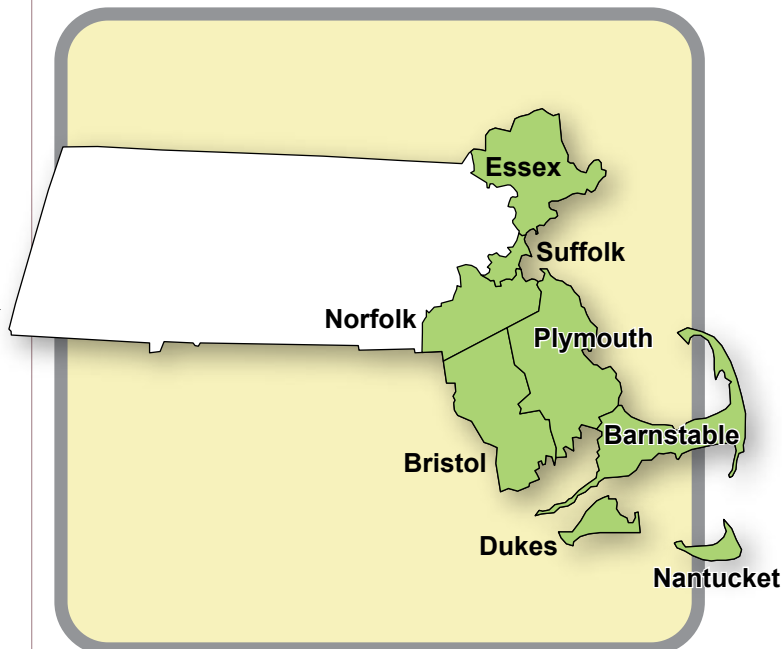


Table 1. Number of monitored and unmonitored coastal beaches by county for 2012

County	Total Beaches	Monitored	Not Monitored
BARNSTABLE	271	271	0
BRISTOL	45	45	0
DUKES	45	45	0
ESSEX	88	88	0
NANTUCKET	18	18	0
NORFOLK	22	22	0
PLYMOUTH	86	86	0
SUFFOLK	26	26	0
TOTALS	601	601	0

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

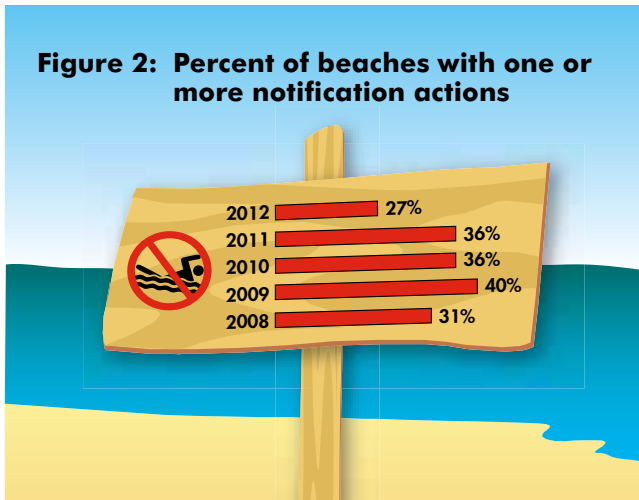
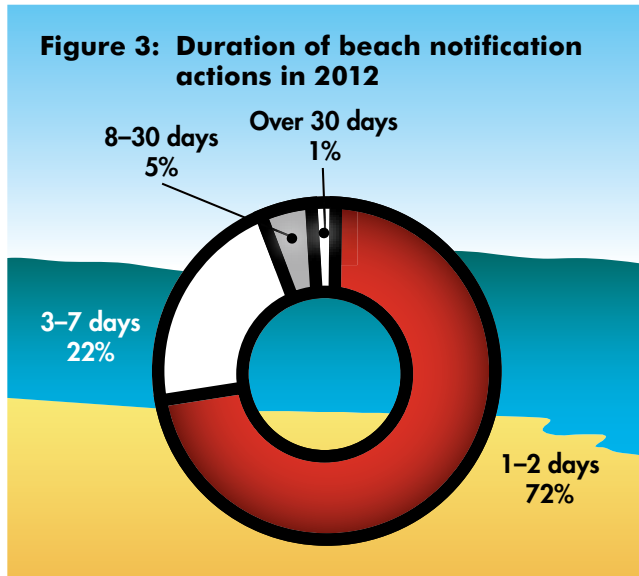


Figure 3: Duration of beach notification actions in 2012



How many beaches had notification actions?

In 2012, of the 601 coastal beaches that Massachusetts monitored, 161 (27 percent) had at least one notification action (Figure 2).

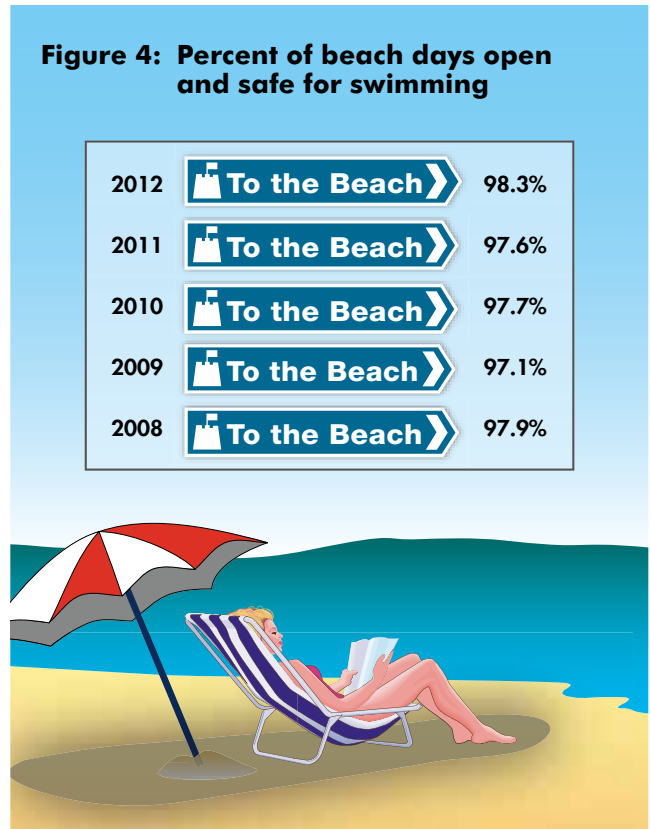
How many notification actions were issued and how long did they last?

Massachusetts issued 326 notification actions during the 2012 swimming season. Typically Massachusetts lifts an action when follow-up monitoring indicates that water quality complies with applicable standards. For the majority of actions (72 percent) water quality returned to normal and beaches were deemed safe for swimming within one or two days (Figure 3). Only rarely (six 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 2012 EPA calculated that 61,553 beach days were associated with the swimming seasons of the 601 monitored Massachusetts beaches. Massachusetts reported notification actions on 1,036 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 beaches in Massachusetts (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/>.