

# IRELAND'S ENVIRONMENT BATHING WATER

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The bathing water season in Ireland runs from June 1st to September 15th each year.
- Ireland's bathing waters are among the best in northern Europe with 94% of our identified bathing waters meeting the new, stricter, minimum EU standards.
- The new bathing water standards are designed to protect both public health and the environment, and are now almost twice as strict as those previously acceptable.
- The EPA currently reports on 137 locations identified by local authorities - these are generally the most popular bathing waters.
- During the bathing season, the latest bathing water quality information, and notifications of any incidents affecting these identified bathing waters as reported by local authorities, can be found on the EPA Splash website at [splash.epa.ie](http://splash.epa.ie) or sign up to receive instant notifications at [twitter.com/EPABathingWater](https://twitter.com/EPABathingWater)

**94%**  
of Ireland's identified  
bathing waters meet  
the minimum  
EU standards



## BATHING WATER ASSESSMENT

Good quality bathing water is a highly desirable natural resource for recreational use as well as being an important economic factor for tourism. Significant improvements in water quality have been achieved over the years due to improvements in wastewater treatment systems and better water quality management practices.

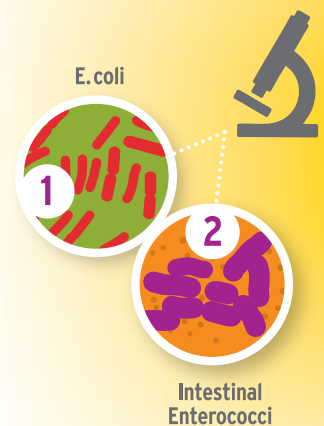
The new Bathing Water Directive was transposed into Irish law in 2008 and is now being implemented in full. Its objective is to improve the protection of bather's health by introducing stricter standards for water quality and a new method of assessment. It has established a more pro-active approach to the assessment of possible pollution risks, and to the management of bathing waters. It also places considerable emphasis on promoting increased public involvement, and for improved dissemination of information on bathing water quality to the general public.

Bathing waters are now classed into four quality categories; 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Sufficient', or 'Poor'. A minimum target of 'Sufficient' is required to be achieved for all bathing waters, and the new stricter standards amount to an almost two fold decrease in the levels of microbiological contamination deemed to be acceptable for bathing waters. The assessment of water quality now includes all monitoring data for the previous 4 bathing seasons (e.g. 2011-2014 inclusive) rather than focusing just on the most recent bathing season.

## WHAT IS MONITORED?

Two microbiological parameters, E. coli and Intestinal Enterococci, are routinely monitored in order to indicate the quality of the bathing water. E. coli and Enterococci live in the gut of warm blooded animals, including humans. They can enter waters in run-off containing small amounts of faeces deposited by animals and birds in agricultural or urban areas, from the spreading of animal manures, directly from wastewater (sewage) treatment systems, or from septic tank discharges.

By themselves they present a relatively low risk of illness at the thresholds set in the regulations. However, because of their abundance they are used as indicators of the potential presence of other bacterial and viral species that may present a greater risk to health.



[splash.epa.ie](http://splash.epa.ie)

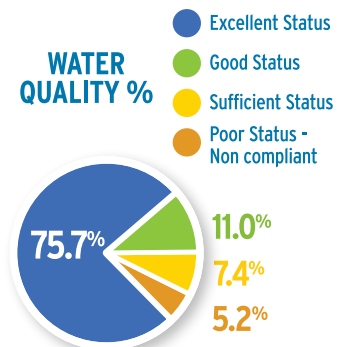
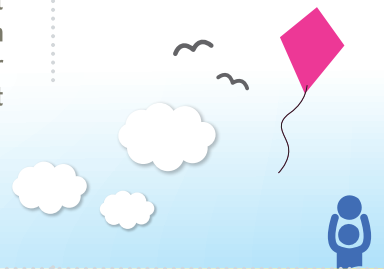
# IRELAND'S ENVIRONMENT BATHING WATER

## BATHING WATER QUALITY

For the 2011-2014 assessment period, 103 (75.7%) of Ireland's identified bathing waters meet 'Excellent', 15 (11%) meet 'Good', and a further 10 (7.4%) meet the 'Sufficient' water quality standards. However, 7 (5.2%) bathing waters were classified as 'Poor' quality which means they will require to have either an 'advice against bathing' or a 'bathing prohibition' restriction in place for the 2015 season, while still requiring to be monitored. The public can still access and use the beach, but warning signs will be placed to advise against bathing. Beach users are encouraged to check the current water quality on the beach notice board. For those bathing waters that have been classified as 'Poor', local authorities have assessed the main pollution risks and the management measures needed to reduce their potential impacts. These measures will be implemented during 2015 and beyond. The local authorities have also developed a communications strategy to keep local business and community groups up to date with the most recent developments using a mix of local media, relevant websites, beach noticeboards, and lifeguards.

## SPLASH: THE EPA'S ONLINE BATHING WATER SYSTEM

Throughout the bathing season, latest bathing water quality information and notifications of any incidents affecting the identified bathing waters as reported by local authorities is displayed on the EPA Splash website at [splash.epa.ie](http://splash.epa.ie). This site also provides information on the compliance history of each bathing area together with bathing safety information [www.iws.ie](http://www.iws.ie), weather, as well as links to Blue Flag status and tides. EPA provides a Twitter messaging service for timely dissemination to the public of any pollution incident warnings at [twitter.com/EPABathingWater](https://twitter.com/EPABathingWater)



## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

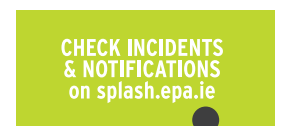
The bathing water regulations provide for input from the general public as to the choice of bathing areas and each year local authorities are required to seek submissions from the public. This is generally undertaken via notification on their websites during the bathing season but national / local media, and community meetings have also been used as communication channels. If your particular local authority has not identified any bathing waters and you know that there are locations which are used for bathing on a regular basis then you should make this information known to them with a request that they be considered for identification so they can be monitored and managed under the Bathing Water Quality Regulations. Any submissions should be accompanied by evidence in relation to the numbers of beach users, and in particular bathers, together with details of any facilities such as car parking, toilets, picnic areas, local amenities etc.



## BLUE FLAG & GREEN COAST AWARDS

The Blue Flag is operated in Ireland by An Taisce-The National Trust for Ireland on behalf of the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). Beaches and marinas that achieve this accolade must comply with a specific set of criteria relating to water quality, information provision, environmental education, safety and beach management. At beaches, the bathing water must comply with the excellent standard in accordance with the EU Bathing Water Directive. There are typically 75-85 Blue flags awarded in Ireland each year [www.blueflagireland.org](http://www.blueflagireland.org)

The Green Coast award scheme [www.cleancoasts.org](http://www.cleancoasts.org) is similar to the Blue Flag scheme, but it is applied to smaller/more rural areas of high water quality, but where the level of infrastructure such as car parking and other facilities may not merit their identification as Blue Flag beaches.



## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

- > Check the noticeboard at the beach for water quality information or pollution incident warnings. Check the latest information and any warnings, or bathing restrictions on [splash.epa.ie](http://splash.epa.ie) before visiting your local beach.
- > If you notice a problem at the beach, then contact your local authority straight away.
- > Log on to Splash '<http://splash.epa.ie/PublicParticipation>' to see how you can nominate any areas which are used for bathing.
- > Keep our beaches clean by taking your rubbish home with you.
- > If you are a dog owner please clean up after your dog.

