

## Tips on staying clean at the beach – HSE National Bathing Water Group 2021

- Ireland has some of the most scenic coastal bathing areas in the world and some of the most pristine bathing waters. In 2020 the vast majority (96%) of our monitored bathing waters achieved the minimum standard almost 9 out of 10 achieved an excellent or good rating.
- A record total of 93 beaches in 2021 were awarded a Blue Flag which is an international award for beach excellence. Another 63 Green Coast Awards were presented to sites with excellent water quality but that are less developed and populated than Blue Flag beaches.
- There is increasing knowledge of the health benefits of Blue Space including improvements to both physical and mental health and well-being.
- However, just like any other outdoor environment, there are all sorts of bugs at the beach and many animals use it as their home.
- There are a lot of ways that beaches become dirty with bugs –
  - littering
  - animals pooing (e.g. horses, dogs, rats and birds)
  - leakage from sewers and septic tanks
  - animal waste from nearby farms getting into rivers and seas and onto beaches.
  - wastewater treatment plants and storm water systems becoming overwhelmed, for example after heavy rainfalls , and untreated water getting into rivers, seas and onto beaches.
- The water quality in stream inlets that run down to or across the beach is often the poorest. This may be because of where these streams come from. For example, many of them may travel through agricultural farmland with slurry spreading, livestock grazing and other hazards.
- So sand should always be considered dirty, just like contact with muck in a garden, and contact with sand may carry a risk of infection.
- For people and families who use beaches and stream inlets on beaches, some are more prone to infection from bugs and animal poo than others. Those who are more at risk of infection are the very young, the elderly and those whose immune system is significantly weakened
- The website [www.beaches.ie](http://www.beaches.ie) has lots of useful information on Irish beaches including information on water quality. Check out your favourite beach before you go

When visiting a beach some simple common sense steps should be taken:

- Use bins, toilets and hand washing facilities where provided.
- Always clean your hands by washing them with tap or bottled water if possible before eating or drinking. If no hand washing facilities are available use wipes or alcohol gel. Do not use

the water in streams to wash your hands. Help young children to clean their hands properly after being in the water or playing in sand and before eating.

- Cover cuts or open wounds properly with a waterproof dressing/ band-aid.
- Dispose of any leftover food, wipes, nappies, empty bottles etc. properly. If no rubbish bins are available, bring your rubbish home and dispose of it there. Don't leave leftover food behind as this will only attract birds, vermin and other wildlife that may then contaminate sand and the general beach environment.
- Avoid any area of the beach that is obviously dirty, for example with litter or animal poo.
- Avoid streams that run down to or across the beach. These stream inlets are very popular with young children but the water quality in them is often poor.
- When a sign has been put up at a beach to advise that the water quality is poor then this advice should be heeded.
- Bring a clean towel or blanket to use if picnicking or sunbathing. A fitted bed sheet that has its corners held up by shoes or beach bags can be very useful to limit sand invading a picnic.
- If you bring your dog for a walk on the beach, clean up after them and dispose of the poo in a bin that is provided at the beach or in your bin at home.
- Take a shower or bath after returning home from the beach