



Safe use of recreational waters: Beaches, lakes and rivers

South Australians are lucky to have access to wonderful beaches, lakes and rivers.

These resources can provide for safe and enjoyable recreational activities with sensible and responsible use. However in some locations, physical features can create hazards and at times water quality can be of concern.

Physical features

By far the greatest risks associated with beaches, lakes and rivers are drowning or injury caused by inappropriate activities (such as diving into shallow water). Sadly, these incidents occur every year.

Advice on water safety for beaches, rivers and lakes is provided on the following websites:

- Surf Life Saving SA
www.surfrescue.com.au
- Royal Life Saving SA
sa.royallifesaving.com.au

At some locations, advice on water quality and beach safety is provided in the form of warning signs. This advice should be followed.

If you are not sure about the safety of a natural water body, seek advice from local councils or surf lifesavers before use.

Water quality

In general, water quality at South Australian beaches and recreational lakes is suitable for recreational activities. However, there are some events that can cause short-term problems including stormwater flows and blue green algae.

Stormwater

Across the metropolitan area we have a network of stormwater drains that collect run-off from our streets and gutters when it rains.

Nearly all metropolitan stormwater flows to the sea directly through stormwater outlets or indirectly through water bodies such as the River Torrens and the Barcoo Outlet, as well as several large storm pipes discharging on to the beach.

Stormwater can contain road grime, leaf litter and faecal material from dogs, cats and birds.

Although the Catchment Water Management Boards, together with local councils, have taken action to greatly reduce the amount of material being washed into stormwater drains, it is impossible to keep it all out.

Summer rain storms after long dry periods wash all this accumulated material into the main stormwater system. This can result in plumes of discoloured water being discharged on to some beaches.

The discoloured water is unpleasant to look at, reduces visibility and can smell. This water can also contain micro-organisms capable of causing mild gastroenteritis.

Beachgoers should not swim or paddle in any water that flows from these

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outlets or accumulates in ponds at the base of the outlets on the beach.

Generally only short stretches of beach are affected by stormwater discharge. It makes sense to avoid patches of discoloured water by moving 300-400 metres along the beach to areas where the water is cleaner. Even after heavy storms, the discoloured water will normally disappear within 2-3 days.

Signs have been erected on some metropolitan beaches to mark sections of beach that have a significant stormwater outlet nearby. They warn beachgoers that polluted stormwater could be discharged into the sea after rain and to avoid swimming if water is discoloured.

West Lakes and the Patawalonga

West Lakes and the Patawalonga are also great places to enjoy water activities and most of the time the water is clean and safe for recreational purposes. However, activities such as swimming, windsurfing and canoeing should be avoided for two to three days after a storm.

Blue-green algae

Blue green algal blooms (cyanobacteria) can occur in fresh water and marine water in South Australia. Blooms represent high concentrations of organisms that are often visible in the form of coloured surface films or scums.

In freshwater the blooms are normally blue-green in colour, but in marine water, the colours can range from blue-green through to yellow, orange and red-brown.

Contact with high numbers of blue-green algae can cause skin rashes or eye irritation in some people, while ingestion could cause stomach upsets or flu-like symptoms.

Avoid contact with coloured surface films or scums in fresh or marine water. Care should also be taken to prevent dogs coming into contact with algal blooms, as they can swallow very high concentrations of organisms from grooming their fur after contact.

Further information

- For information on beach water quality and results of water quality testing go to the EPA website:
www.environment.sa.gov.au/reporting/coast/
- Your local council Environmental Health Officer
- The Department of Health on 8226-7100 or go to our website:
www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environment-health-index.htm
- Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board website:
www.amlrnm.sa.gov.au
- Caring for our Country - Community Coastcare:
www.nrm.gov.au/funding/coastcare.html

Contact

Applied Environmental Health
Public Health
SA Health
1st floor, Citi Centre Building
11 Hindmarsh Square
Adelaide SA 5000

PO Box 6, Rundle Mall
Adelaide SA 5000

Tel 08 8226 7100
Fax 08 8226 7102

ABN 97 643 356 590

Email: public.health@health.sa.gov.au

Web: www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environment-health-index.htm

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