

Stormwater Drainpipe Signs in North Carolina

What do these signs mean?

These signs are posted where stormwater pipes are discharging water into coastal swimming areas. They recommend that people do not swim within 200 feet on either side of the sign. You may see these signs at drainpipes in Carteret, Dare and New Hanover counties. The flow may not be visible if the mouth of the pipe is in the surf. If so, the sign on the right will be posted.

People are advised not to swim in the area when the pipe has stormwater coming from it. The Recreational Water Quality Program's tests have shown that after rainfall, the runoff coming out of the pipe often exceeds state and federal standards for bacteria. Swimming in the waters near the pipe can cause an increased risk of illness.



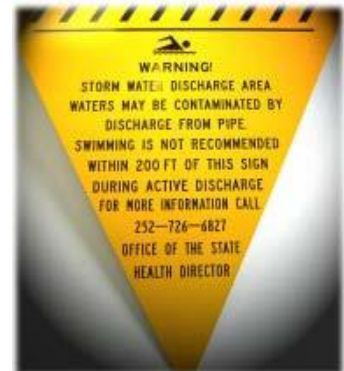
What is stormwater runoff?

When rain falls, the water that isn't able to sink into the ground washes everything lying on hard surfaces (roads, driveways, roofs and parking lots) into pipes, some of which empty into coastal waters. The contaminants on the ground can include pet and wildlife waste, gas and petroleum products, pesticides and fertilizers. The state's Recreational Water Quality program tests for bacteria found in the intestines of warm-blooded animals, including people. If it is present in the water at high enough levels, people swimming or playing in the water run an increased risk of developing a gastrointestinal illness (diarrhea and/or vomiting) or a skin infection, particularly people with compromised immune systems.

It is important to note that unlike some states, North Carolina does not have sanitary sewer outfalls discharging from pipes to our ocean beaches. Our stormwater collection systems are separate from the wastewater treatment systems and do not connect with those pipes.

Why are these signs displayed?

Past data show that stormwater tends to have high bacteria counts. Therefore, people are warned to swim away from the signs, so they don't expose themselves to an increased risk of illness. This way, if people see discharge coming from the pipe, they can play it safe and avoid swimming near it.



Is it okay for my children to play in the ponds and streams created by these pipes?

Some pipes discharge onto the beach sand, creating a pond or stream. Some parents like their children to play in these puddles or ponds because they think the children are safer away from the waves and current, but this is not a good idea. These ponds are different from natural tidal pools in that they contain all the pollutants of stormwater without the dilution effect of the ocean. Allowing children to play in them, particularly small children who may swallow water, exposes them to an increased risk of getting sick.

Will I get sick if I swim in waters under a swimming advisory? What kind of illnesses could I get from swimming in polluted waters?

Not necessarily, but you are at an increased risk. The most common illnesses are gastrointestinal diseases with symptoms such as diarrhea and vomiting. Ear, nose, throat, skin and respiratory infections are also commonly associated with swimming in contaminated water. If you become ill after swimming in North Carolina's coastal waters, seek medical treatment and then please contact us at the phone number below. We would like to know about any possible waterborne illnesses as soon as possible to prevent others from becoming ill. You may contact our office at

(252) 726-6827 or by e-mail at erin.bryan-millush@ncdenr.gov or visit us online at:

<https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries/shellfish-sanitation-and-recreational-water-quality/recreational-water-quality>