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GRAND TRAVERSE REGION BEACH TESTING BEGINS JUNE 17 THE WATERSHED CENTER TO SAMPLE 21 LOCAL BEACHES THROUGH SEPTEMBER 9

Traverse City, MI; June 10, 2026 – [The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay](#) will begin its annual beach monitoring program on June 17, 2026, sampling 21 beaches across Benzie, Grand Traverse, and Leelanau counties. Beaches will be tested weekly for harmful *E. coli* bacteria every Wednesday through September 9.

“We are proud to provide this service each summer,” said Sarah U'Ren, Program Director at The Watershed Center. “Weekly *E. coli* monitoring is a vital part of protecting public health and ensuring our beaches remain safe for residents and visitors.”

“Each summer, thousands of people visit our beaches to swim, relax, and enjoy the outdoors,” added Brent Wheat, Environmental Health Director at the Grand Traverse County Health Department. “Routine water quality monitoring helps ensure these waters are safe for recreational use.”

Elevated *E. coli* levels indicate fecal contamination, which can carry harmful pathogens and pose health risks – especially for young children and individuals with compromised immune systems.

“Our beach monitoring program provides timely, accurate water quality information to help protect public health,” said Eric Johnston, Environmental Health Director for the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department. “By sharing results with the public, we help keep our communities safe while enjoying local waters.”

Test results will be available by midday Thursdays and posted on the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy [BeachGuard website](#) and The Watershed Center [Facebook page](#). If high bacteria levels are detected, advisories will be posted at impacted beaches and follow-up testing will continue until levels return to acceptable standards.

The Grand Traverse County Health Department will issue media releases only when beaches reach a Level 2 or higher water quality index. All results will be posted on GTCHD's [Public Beach Monitoring website](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#) accounts. The Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department will issue weekly media releases and post results on its [website](#) and [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts.



In addition to routine sampling, The Watershed Center will also pilot a new rapid screening technology, BactiQuick, at seven Traverse City beaches in partnership with the Great Lakes Environmental Center. This emerging method can provide preliminary results in as little as 15 minutes.

While BactiQuick will not replace standard laboratory testing for issuing advisories, it may allow staff to quickly confirm when bacteria levels are low and provide an immediate “all clear” without additional sampling. Results from the pilot will be compared with traditional testing methods and shared with researchers at Michigan State University and the University of Michigan, contributing to ongoing statewide evaluations of this technology.

Along with measuring *E. coli* levels, The Watershed Center will continue bacterial source tracking to better understand where contamination at local beaches originates. Using advanced microbial source tracking techniques, water samples with elevated *E. coli* levels are analyzed for host-specific genetic markers that can identify whether bacteria is coming from humans, canines, cows, pigs, or gulls. This year, testing will also expand to include raccoons, Canada geese, and other waterfowl to better pinpoint sources of contamination.

Beachgoers are encouraged to take simple actions to reduce the risk of *E. coli* at beaches such as not feeding ducks and other birds, disposing of diapers (including swim diapers) in trash cans, and having young children take frequent bathroom breaks. Beachgoers are also reminded not to swim near storm drains, especially during and immediately after rain events, as runoff may contain harmful bacteria. *E. coli* levels after a rain event often decrease as sunlight naturally breaks down the bacteria in open water.

Funding for beach monitoring comes from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency BEACH Act Funds; Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy’s Water Resources Division; the Village of Empire; and the Village of Beulah.

Testing will be conducted at the following beaches:

Lake Michigan

- Van’s Beach
- Empire Beach
- Frankfort Beach

Grand Traverse Bay - West

- Bryant Park (Traverse City)
- Sunset Park (Traverse City)
- Senior Beach (Traverse City)
- Clinch Park (Traverse City)
- Volleyball Beach (Traverse City)
- West End Beach (Traverse City)
- Greilickville Harbor Park
- Omena Beach
- Suttons Bay South Shore Beach
- Suttons Bay Marina Park Beach



- Northport Beach
- Grand Traverse Bay - East
- East Bay Park (Traverse City)
 - Haserot Park Beach
 - Traverse City State Park
 - Acme Bayside Park
 - Saylor Park (Acme)
- Inland Beaches
- South Bar Beach (South Bar Lake)
 - Beulah Beach (Crystal Lake)

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About The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay

The Watershed Center is a Traverse City-based non-profit organization that advocates for clean water in Grand Traverse Bay and acts to protect and preserve its watershed. The Watershed Center blends scientific and policy expertise with education, advocacy, collaboration, and solution-oriented actions to serve as a multi-faceted resource for the community. The Watershed Center engages people in ways that increase knowledge, enjoyment, pride, and informed decision-making around water. For additional information, please visit gtbay.org.