Massachusetts Coastal Beach Parking Pass Rules (DCR, Town Sticker, and Transit Access) Matrix

Companion Reference Sheet for: Massachusetts Swimming Beaches: What to Check Before Arrival
Save this PDF to your phone or print a copy for field reference. Verify local conditions and manufacturer specs before use.

Key Takeaways

Question	What to know before you go
Where can I find a beach's current status?	Search the official beach status dashboard or local health department advisories by beach name and town. Our Massachusetts swimming beach listings can help you identify destinations, but they are not a live water quality report.
What does an open status mean?	It means no active restriction appears in that authority's status information at the time you check. It does not guarantee that conditions will stay the same or that every physical hazard has been assessed.
Which bacteria are monitored?	Marine beach testing commonly uses Enterococcus, while freshwater testing may use Enterococcus or E. coli. Read the listing's beach type and test indicator together.
Does no advisory mean the water was just tested?	No. A missing notice or an older sample is not the same as a recent result confirming safe swimming conditions.
What if the beach is closed to swimming?	Do not enter the water. Follow the local authority's instructions and check its official notices for an update or reopening.
What should I check when I arrive?	Match the beach name and town, read signs, look for changing conditions, and follow lifeguard directions before swimming.

Find the Exact Beach and Its Current Status

Measure	Marine water	Fresh water
Single sample maximum allowable Enterococci	104 colony forming units per 100ml	235 colony forming units per 100ml
Geometric mean limit	35 Enterococci CFU per 100 ml	126 E. coli CFU per 100 ml
Samples used for the geometric mean	Most recent 5 samples in the bathing season	Most recent 5 samples in the bathing season

Check Sample Dates, Rainfall, and Runoff

Beach	What stands out	Planning note
Skaket Beach	Warm, shallow Cape Cod Bay water, broad tidal flats at low tide, and sunset views.	Check the tide and current swimming conditions before choosing your arrival time.
South Cape Beach	A mile of sandy shoreline on Nantucket Sound, with trails through salt marshes and pine woods.	Pair a beach visit with a walk, and check local notices for swimming conditions.
Nahant Beach	A 2.5 mile beach on a causeway, with a promenade and volleyball courts.	Confirm the exact access area and its posted conditions when you arrive.
Scusset Beach	A sandy beach at the Cape Cod Canal, with camping and a 3,000 foot jetty popular for fishing.	Keep swimming plans separate from activity near the jetty and follow local signs.

Understand Bacterial Testing and Results

Beach managers test for indicator bacteria because their presence can point to contamination that may raise the risk of illness. Indicator bacteria do not identify every possible germ in the water, and a test result describes the sample collected at a particular place and time.

Marine and freshwater results may use different indicators and criteria. Barnstable County's bathing beach water quality information distinguishes these measures in its criteria:

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These are the criteria described by Barnstable County, not a live reading for every Massachusetts beach. When viewing a result, make sure you know whether it applies to marine water or a freshwater beach, which indicator was tested, and whether the value is a single sample or a geometric mean.

There is no one bacteria level that describes every Massachusetts swimming beach on a given day. Results differ by location and sample date, so use the current notice for the specific beach you plan to visit.

Published by The Beach Directory (thebeachdirectory.com), a publication of Viking Trading Group LLC.
Source URL: https://thebeachdirectory.com/massachusetts-swimming-beaches-what-to-check-before-arrival/