

A safe swim, where?

15 beaches deemed dangerous under strict new EU rules

By Eamon Donoghue

AS bathers hit the water this weekend, 15 beaches nationwide have been deemed potentially dangerous and are at risk of closure if they continue failing to meet new EU quality regulations.

Four Irish beaches are failing to meet the minimum required standard, while 11 have been deemed 'vulnerable' by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Agricultural run-off, heavy rainfall and waste-water treatment discharge have plagued these beaches, preventing them from being granted a 'good water quality safety' status.

Revised EU Bathing Water regulations to be implemented in December puts them at risk of closure.

The warning comes after an E.coli outbreak was reported at Bettystown beach in Co. Meath this week.

Meath County Council was criticised on Thursday for failing to put up large notices and not having staff at Bettystown beach notifying people the water had elevated levels of E.coli and enterococci bacteria. Hundreds of families had flocked to the beach to enjoy the water as temperatures rose on Wednesday.

The council said that within an hour of getting the results of tests on the water, it had erected a notice at the entrance to the beach and put it on its website.

One such case of a person being affected by filthy water was high-

13 people drowned within two weeks last summer

lighted yesterday when a teenager was reported to have contracted a 'flesh-eating bug' while swimming in Dublin's Grand Canal.

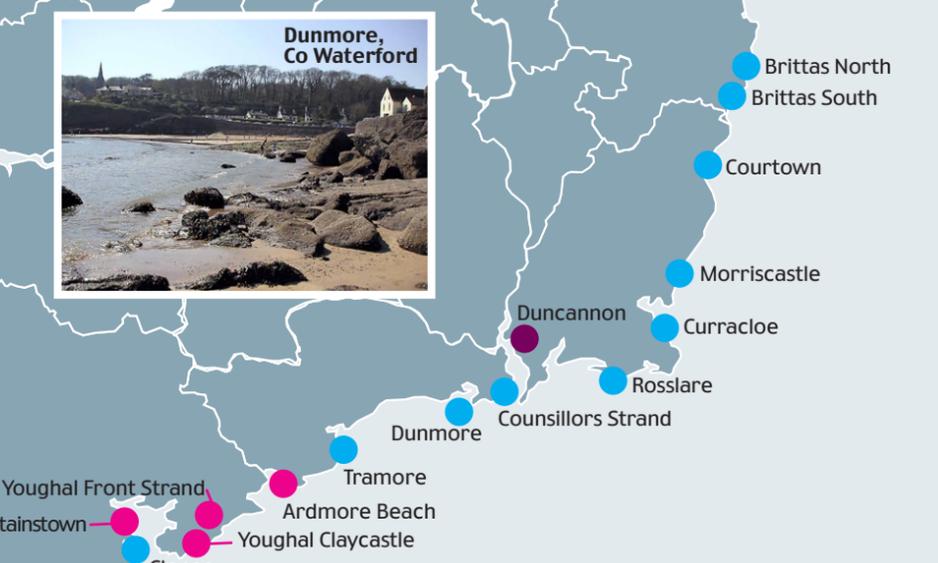
Eamon Sneddon, 15, was wearing a swimsuit but still contracted the 'bug'. His mother, Rachel Sneddon, from Ringsend, south Dublin, said her doctor warned her and her son about swimming in that water.

'The doctor told him to stay away from that water. He said it's filthy and it's full of toxins and whatever else,' she said. Speaking to Dublin's 98fm radio station, Ms Sneddon said she wants the authorities to place a ban on swimming in the Grand and Royal canals.

New EU rules will see the status of beaches being determined by the previous four years of collated data. An EPA spokesman said: 'The beaches which have restrictions placed on them, if at all, will depend on the quality of monitoring samples undertaken in the 2014 season. Though those rated as 'Poor' in the 2013 Bathing Water report are the most likely to fail to meet the standard.'

The eight local authorities whose beaches are in danger are Cork, Fingal, Galway, Waterford, Westmeath and Wexford County councils, along with Dublin and Galway city councils. Dublin city and Fingal county councils are facing the possible closure of Balbriggan (Front Strand), Loughshinny Beach, Rush South Beach and Sandymount Strand.

FROM BLUE FLAGS TO THE LESS DESIRABLE...



- Blue Flag beaches
- Beaches identified as 'vulnerable' by the EPA but classified as sufficient
- Poor

Galway County Council is in danger of losing three of its beaches, one in Clifden and two in Spideal. Meanwhile, Galway City Council has explained that its beach in Ballyloughane 'has a few issues'. It is one of the four beaches currently identified as 'poor' by the EPA.

The sampling season runs from June 1 until September 15 - with a minimum number of five testings

required. The EPA said the newly introduced regulations are 'twice as strict' and will focus 'much more on the assessment and management of pressures on bathing waters such as sewage and agriculture'.

As the sun came out this week, the county's beaches quickly filled up - but so did piles of rubbish and the level of anti-social behaviour.

Earlier this month, hundreds of

teenagers were involved in violent clashes and other instances of anti-social behaviour at Howth beach.

On Thursday morning more than 200 bags of rubbish were collected at Dublin's Portmarnock beach.

With the good weather set to continue this weekend, swimmers have been warned of the dangers of alcohol when entering the water.

Last year Ireland witnessed its

greatest number of drownings in 40 years. Some 13 people died in the space of two weeks in 2013.

Drinkaware spokesman Fionnuala Sheehan warned: 'Drinkaware is encouraging everyone thinking of going for a swim with friends or taking part in water sports over the coming days to remember alcohol and swimming are not a good mix.'

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