

How to find the best beaches with Waterkeepers' Swim Guide for iPhone® Backgrounder

The Swim Guide is an app for iPhone®, iPad®, and iPod touch® that makes it easy to explore and enjoy the best beaches on the Great Lakes and in the Vancouver area.

- ▶ Find your closest beach using list, map, or search tools
- ▶ Discover a wide variety of beaches, ranging from city parks to remote lakes ideal for camping
- ▶ Identify at a glance which beaches are safe for swimming (Green) and which are unsafe for swimming (Red) in real-time
- ▶ Get walking, driving, or transit directions to the beach of your choice
- ▶ Bookmark beaches for easy access
- ▶ Invite your friends to join you at the beach using Facebook, Twitter, email and SMS text messaging
- ▶ Report pollution or environmental concerns

The Swim Guide gives you original descriptions with photographs of 800 different beaches in Ontario, BC, New York State, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota. Find the best beaches in cities like Toronto, Chicago, and Vancouver. Learn a bit of history and geography as you explore!



The free Swim Guide is available via the App StoreSM

Visit: <http://bit.ly/SwimGuideApp>

Or use the QR code.



The Story of Swim Guide

Swim Guide began in Toronto, Canada. A team of staff and volunteers at the charity Lake Ontario Waterkeeper set out to answer this simple question: *is it safe to swim in Lake Ontario?*

As it turns out, reliable facts and figures about beach water quality are hard to come by. So we started compiling our own.

For five years, we tracked which beaches were open and posted on scraps of paper and clunky spreadsheets and generated an annual report for our watershed. Each year we expanded our beach report to include more beaches in more parts of Southern Ontario and upstate New York.

It was interesting for us as researchers, but it wasn't very helpful to you, as a beach-goer. What you really needed was some tool that would tell you where the beaches are and which ones are safe for swimming *right now*.

Two years ago, we decided to make that tool. First, we built a Swim Guide engine so that every day we can phone or visit the websites for a ton of beach monitoring agencies and enter the information into our custom-built database.

Seven years and thousands of hours after you first asked us if it is safe to swim at your beach, we can finally crunch the numbers and answer: "Yes, usually."

Of course, answering your question was only step one. Our next challenge was figuring out how to give you easy to read beach quality information *whenever* you want it, *wherever* you want it.

That was no easy task. This summer, for example, we will check-in with about 70 different sources who monitor about 800 beaches every day. We will record about 70,000 different points of data in our Swim Guide database. We will convert that information into a format that means something to you: *here is where it is safe to swim, and this is how you get there*.

Enter the Swim Guide app for iPhone®. This free app helps you find your closest beaches, know at a glance which ones are safe for swimming, and share your love of beaches with your friends.

This last part - sharing your love of beaches - is really important to us. We can't restore and protect the world's greatest beaches without you and your friends. We can't



celebrate and enjoy the beach culture in our own backyards without you and your friends.

In the spirit of sharing, the folks at Lake Ontario Waterkeeper went and added *all* of the beaches on the Great Lakes to Swim Guide. We know that people who live near one Great Lake also love to visit parks and beaches in different watersheds.

We also invited other watershed protection organizations to join our Swim Guide team. Fraser Riverkeeper tracks beaches in the Vancouver area (launching June 10, 2011). North Saskatchewan Riverkeeper tracks beaches in the Edmonton area (launching August 2011). Biscayne Bay Waterkeeper tracks beaches in the Miami area (launching September 2011). By this time next year, we'd love to see Swim Guide in every major beach community in North America.

We built Swim Guide for one reason and one reason only: because we love your beaches. We want you to explore, enjoy and learn about the fantastic beaches near you.

Come swim with us. Visit <http://bit.ly/SwimGuideApp> now.

Acknowledgements: Swim Guide would not be the project it is today without the tireless efforts of many volunteers and donors. For their support and inspiration, we thank Gord Downie and The Tragically Hip team, RBC Blue Water Project, Karen and Kevin Lowe, Britt Standen, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Mary Beth Postman, Dylan Neild, and Kim Samuel-Johnson. Thanks also to the numerous individual donors who support the Waterkeeper vision.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Where does your beach water quality data come from?

Swim Guide pulls together beach posting information from about 70 different monitoring agencies, mostly municipal and state health authorities. We check hotlines and websites on a daily basis to find out which beaches are open and which are posted. If there is a difference between Swim Guide's beach status and what you see when you are actually at a beach, you should always defer to the local monitoring agency.

How often is Swim Guide information updated?

We try to update beach status results around noon EST.

What does it mean when a beach is "posted"?

A beach is posted when it fails to meet certain water quality criteria. The criteria include problems like *E. coli* levels, cloudiness of the water, recent heavy rainfall, and algae blooms. The criteria differ from province to province and state to state and are more protective in some places than in others. We use the same water quality criteria as the local authority. If we are concerned about water quality, we always err on the side of caution.

Is "posting" a beach different from "closing" a beach?

Yes. A "posted" beach is one where local monitoring authorities believe there is a health risk to swimmers, usually because bacteria levels are too high. A beach may be posted one day and open another, because bacteria levels change quickly. Beach "postings" are also known as beach "advisories".

Beach closures are more serious and, in many cases, permanent. You should never touch the water at a closed beach.

What causes beach postings and closures?

E. coli is the most commonly used indicator of water quality health at a beach. *E. coli* are a type of bacteria found in the waste (feces) of most warm-blooded animals. *E. coli* is a better indicator of human sewage than other bacteria.

High levels of *E. coli* may be found at a beach if there is a nearby sewage treatment plant, combined sewage outfalls (which dump untreated waste into water before it reaches the treatment plant), stormwater outfalls, agricultural runoff, faulty septic systems, or large populations of waterfowl.

Beaches may also be posted for other reasons: turbidity may be high so you can't see through the water, algae blooms may make the water unsafe, there may have been a spill, for example.

What are the risks of swimming at a dirty beach?

When *E. coli* is found at the beach, it is a sign that the water is contaminated with human/animal waste and may contain bacteria and pathogens (disease-causing organisms), as well as viruses and parasites.

If you swim or splash in waters contaminated with *E. coli*, pathogens may enter your body through cuts or openings such as your mouth, nose and ears. The most common effects are minor eye, ear, nose, or throat infections or stomach disorders. You may also develop a rash. More serious diseases and illnesses may also be contracted in heavily polluted waters, including typhoid fever, hepatitis, gastroenteritis, and dysentery.

What does the Green / Red / Yellow swimmer icon on my beach mean?

Every beach is coded based on its current status or its historical status.

Current Status: Green means the beach is open right now. Red means the beach is posted right now. Grey means the status of the beach is unavailable or unreliable. Yellow is reserved for historical status of your beach.

Historical status: Green means the beach is open 95% of the time or more. Yellow means the beach is open 60-95% of the time. Red means the beach is posted 40% of the time or more. Grey means the data is unavailable or unreliable.

Special status: We may manually set the status for a specific beach if we have concerns about the sampling protocol, if there is an emergency, or if monitoring practices have recently changed.

The Swim Guide shares the best information we have at the moment you ask for it. Always obey signs posted at the beach or advisories from official government agencies.

What is the difference between "historical status", "current status", and "special status"?

Current status tells you whether a beach is open or posted right now. It is based on daily data entries.

Historical status tells you whether a beach is usually open or posted, based on historical information in our database. If a beach is not in season, or if it is not being sampled reliably, Swim Guide will display Historical status instead of Current status.

You can also turn your iPhone® on its side (make sure your screen lock is turned off!) to view historical information for many beaches in our database. This feature is under development and may not work for all beaches yet.

Special status means we have manually set the status for a beach because we do not believe the information in the database is reliable. This may be because sampling data is missing or because there have been changes at a beach.

You missed a beach!

Thanks for letting us know. Email as much information about this missing beach to news@waterkeeper.ca and we'll add it to Swim Guide.

Why isn't my watershed in your app?

Good question! The answer could be one of two things. It may be that no government agency is monitoring the water quality in your area, so we have no data to work with. More likely, it is because this is Swim Guide's first year. We are in the process of expanding and hope to bring Swim Guide to every place that needs it. You can help us get the work done faster by making a donation, becoming a sponsor, or doing the work for us.

I have important information to add to a beach description. How can I submit it?

Email as at news@waterkeeper.ca and we'll add your information to Swim Guide.

Where do I get the Swim Guide app for iPhone?

Apps for the iPhone can be downloaded through the App StoreSM. Follow this link: <http://bit.ly/SwimGuideApp> . Or fire up iTunes and search for "Swim Guide".

How do I use the Swim Guide app for iPhone?

See our step-by-step manual for "Getting Started".

Will Swim Guide for iPhone work on my iPad® or iPod touch®?

Yes! If you do **not** have a 3G iPad or access to a wifi connection where you want to use the app, you should load all the information you need before you leave home. See "Can I use Swim Guide without an internet connection".

Can I use Swim Guide without an internet connection?

Yes. If you do **not** have an internet connection where you want to use the app, you should load all the information you need before you leave home. Swim Guide will remember each screen you view while you are connected to the internet and you can revisit each of these screens while you are offline. View the Beach Map and make sure the beaches you are interested in load properly. Tap each beach you may want to look

at while you are offline. You can bookmark them for easy access later. Swim Guide will save all of the screens that you view for offline viewing. If you try to load a screen for the first time without an internet connection, Swim Guide may have problems loading the information. Please be aware that the red/yellow/green beach ratings will not update unless you are connected to the internet. Always defer to beach advisories posted at the beaches.

Can I get Swim Guide for my Android/Blackberry/other smartphone?

Soon. We are working on an Android app now, as well as a smartphone-optimized version of the website.

Can I add new photos to Swim Guide?

Email the images to news@waterkeeper.ca, along with a declaration of some kind that confirms you have the rights to the image. If it's better than our current photo, we'll add your picture to Swim Guide and give you full credit.

Who paid for the Swim Guide?

Swim Guide was paid for with donations from individuals just like you, as well as a grant from the good folks at the RBC Blue Water Project. It takes a lot of work to add more watersheds to Swim Guide and to keep the data up-to-date, so please make a donation or become a sponsor to help keep the project going. Contact news@waterkeeper.ca for more information.

Why should I donate?

Swim Guide needs your support to achieve the dream of a swimmable world.

When you donate to the Swim Guide:

- ▶ you help to record the status of hundreds of beaches in North America each day
- ▶ you help to identify the beaches that need protection from pollution
- ▶ you help create the cleanup and restoration plans to win back lost beaches
- ▶ you help fund speaking tours and public awareness campaigns promoting local beaches
- ▶ you help promote best practices for monitoring, sampling, reporting, and restoring beaches.

How do I donate to support Swim Guide?

Visit www.theswimguide.org/donate or text "Drink" to 45678 on your smartphone. A \$10 donation will appear on your next phone bill.



Can I become a sponsor of Swim Guide?

Yes! Send an email to news@waterkeeper.ca and we will get right back to you. We have a bunch of great sponsorship opportunities, ranging from affordable local beach sponsorships to national and international collaborations.

I work with a watershed NGO or government agency. Can I use Swim Guide?

Yes! Send an email to news@waterkeeper.ca and let us know how Swim Guide can help in your area. We promise to get back to you right away.

I want to cover Swim Guide in my newspaper/ radio program/ blog / television show/ other media outlet. Can I have more information?

Of course. Feel free to contact us anytime; we're happy to send you our electronic press kit and to answer all of your questions: (416) 861-1237 or news@waterkeeper.ca. If you are working on a local story, you can find contacts for our affiliates in the EPK.

Participating Organizations



Contact: Mark Mattson
President & Waterkeeper
416-861-1237
admin@waterkeeper.ca
www.waterkeeper.ca

Lake Ontario Waterkeeper

We are the creators and managers of the Swim Guide. Our dream is to nurture a thriving beach culture on the Great Lakes and to have the cleanest beaches in the world at our doorstep. By supporting our work, you support the entire Swim Guide project *and* help to protect most of the beaches in Southern Ontario and upstate New York.

Keywords: beaches, swimming, aggregates, energy, clean water workshop, swim, sewage, Lake Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Contact: Alexis Segal
Waterkeeper & Executive Director
Alexis@bbwk.org
www.bbwk.org

Biscayne Bay Waterkeeper

We are the first U.S. team to join the Swim Guide. Our dream is to promote and support Florida's unique, dynamic beach community. By supporting our work, you are helping to bring the Swim Guide to the United States *and* support protection of Florida's spectacular beaches.

Keywords: Biscayne Bay, Florida, Miami, swim, beach, sewage, dredging, oil spill, industrial wastewater, nutrient pollution, everglades, turkey point nuclear facility



FRASER RIVERKEEPER®

"Wild Salmon Forever"

Contact: Karen Wristen
Executive Director
1-888-5-KEEPER
Info@fraserriverkeeper.ca
www.fraserriverkeeper.ca

Fraser Riverkeeper

We are the first B.C. team to join the Swim Guide. Our dream is to strengthen and support the beach community around the B.C. mainland. By supporting our work, you are helping to bring the Swim Guide to the Pacific Coast.

Keywords: salmon, Fraser River, British Columbia, Vancouver, sewage, swim, beach, aquaculture, landfills, industrial pollution



Contact: Glenn Isaac
Riverkeeper
780-554-3848
glenn@saskriverkeeper.ca
www.saskriverkeeper.ca

North Saskatchewan Riverkeeper

We are the first Alberta-based team to join the Swim Guide. Our dream is to create widespread awareness for Western Canada's freshwater resources. When complete, our Swim Guide will be the first to span multiple provinces. By supporting our work, you are helping to bring the Swim Guide to communities in our watershed from Alberta through Saskatchewan to Manitoba.

Keywords: hydroelectric generation, energy, oil, gas, mining, aggregate, agriculture, swim, beaches, sewage, dewatering



Reviews

"Next time you head for the beach, make sure you've got Lake Ontario Waterkeeper's Swim Guide iPhone® app on hand, along with your sunscreen and towel."

-- **Canadian Geographic**

"Finally, and brilliantly, a simple and sure guide that will let you know where on Lake Ontario the swimming is safe. Lake Ontario Waterkeeper continues to be at the forefront of wise and savvy Great Lakes water protection. What a fantastic and useful idea this one is!"

-- **author, Joseph Boyden**

Swim Guide is the most important app you will download this year. It connects us to the important places that we've forgotten belong to us."

-- **musician, Gord Downie**

Testimonials

"The Swim Guide is a powerful tool that links water advocates with citizens who benefit from clean water. Working together, I expect to see our communities protecting and winning back their right to a swimmable, drinkable fishable future."

-- **Marc Yaggi, Executive Director, Waterkeeper Alliance**

"Just by asking for the data on beaches, we've prompted some agencies work to make information more available and more accessible. That's important in B.C. where water quality monitoring is spotty. Swim Guide puts all the data in the palm of your hand."

-- **Doug Chapman, Riverkeeper, Fraser Riverkeeper**

"Biscayne Bay Waterkeeper is excited to bring Swim Guide to Southeast Florida. The year-round access to tropical beaches for locals and visitors alike make this incredible tool is a perfect fit for our area, and we feel lucky to participate in this program. The Swim Guide will serve as an easy-to-use resource to ensure safe swimming, inform beach-goers of potential water issues, and educate the public about the status of amazing natural resources."

-- **Alexis K. Segal, Waterkeeper & Executive Director, Biscayne Bay Waterkeeper**

"Swim Guide makes it easier than ever before to bring people and beaches together. It's like calling a friend to check on the status of the beach in your own neighbourhood. And when neighbourhoods connect with their beaches, they work to protect them."

-- **Glenn Isaac, Riverkeeper, North Saskatchewan Riverkeeper**



"The Swim Guide brings us closer to Waterkeepers' dream of a future where we can all safely touch the water in our own backyards. It gives meaning to your right to clean, swimmable recreational water. The Swim Guide is a giant step forward for environmental awareness and public participation."

-- Mark Mattson, President & Waterkeeper, Lake Ontario Waterkeeper

"The beaches of Lake St. Clair suffer more from water quality problems than most of the beaches in Michigan. The Swim Guide will help connect my community with our watershed so that we can celebrate the public spaces we love and draw attention to the areas where there's still work to do."

-- Doug Martz, Channelkeeper, St. Clair Channelkeeper

"Swim Guide is an exciting app that helps me keep my community informed about which waterways are swimmable. I am so glad to have this tool on the Great Lakes!"

-- Cheryl Nenn, Milwaukee Riverkeeper

"Having one source for Great Lakes beach information is be great, especially in the summer for the beaches. Lake Erie has beaches in four states (Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York) and one province (Ontario). The Great Lakes waters need a basin wide water information approach so we can all strive for fishable, drinkable, swimmable waters."

-- Sandy Bihn, Lake Erie Waterkeeper


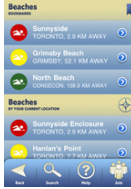

"The Swim Guide is an important component in the fight to protect and restore the waters of the Buffalo Niagara region. A valuable resource for local water quality issues, its also offers the important added benefit of providing a voice for our community to speak out about the health of our waterways."

-- Julie O'Neill, Executive Director and Riverkeeper, Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper

Additional Resources





Artwork for publication



Feel free to use this artwork to accompany articles that reference Swim Guide.

| Thumbnail | Description | Download |
|---|--|--|
|  | <p>Swim Guide Home Screen iPhone app v1.0</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/Intbvg</p> |
|  | <p>Individual Beach Page iPhone app v1.0</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/kZTBW9</p> |
|  | <p>Beach List Bookmarks at top followed by beaches listed by proximity iPhone app v1.0</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/jl2rRn</p> |
|  | <p>Beach Map iPhone app v1.0</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/mNGctI</p> |
|  | <p>iPhone app icon v1.0</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/mLzZsx</p> |
|  | <p>QR Code to download Swim Guide app on App Store</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/SwimGuideApp.qrcode</p> |

Photos for publication

Feel free to use these images to accompany articles that reference Swim Guide. Please credit the photographer each time the image is used.

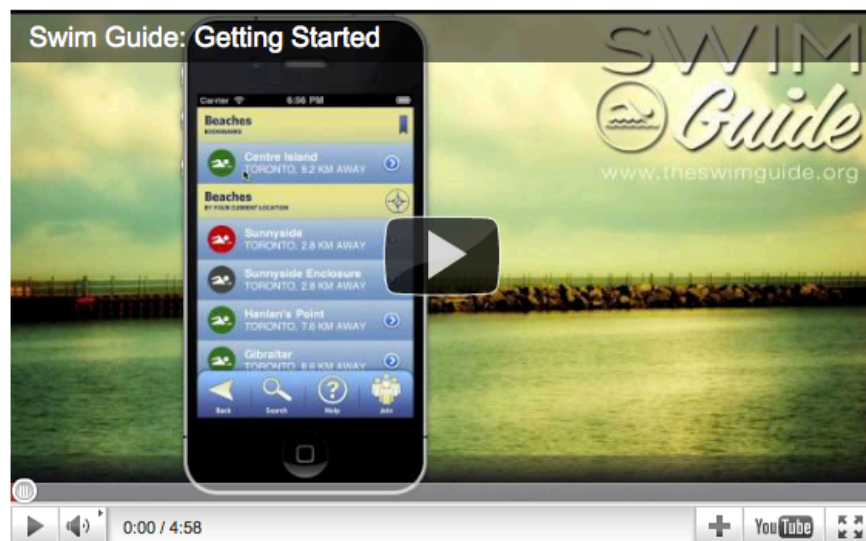
| Thumbnail | Location | Credit | Download |
|---|--|-----------------------------|--|
|  | <p>Jericho Beach Vancouver British Columbia Canada</p> | <p>Suzanne Rushton</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/jYrKvp</p> |
|  | <p>Woodbine-Ashbridges Bay Toronto Ontario Canada</p> | <p>Flavia Cherewaty</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/jrLLPs</p> |
|  | <p>Cherry Beach Toronto Ontario Canada</p> | <p>Flavia Cherewaty</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/lbnV1E</p> |
|  | <p>Cherry Beach Toronto Ontario Canada</p> | <p>Flavia Cherewaty</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/kcEzr1</p> |

| Thumbnail | Location | Credit | Download |
|--|---|-----------------------------|--|
|  | <p>Cherry Beach Toronto Ontario Canada</p> | <p>Flavia Cherewaty</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/jh9pXY</p> |
|  | <p>Woodbine-Ashbridges Bay Toronto Ontario Canada</p> | <p>Flavia Cherewaty</p> | <p>http://bit.ly/l1Mzti</p> |

Instructional video: <http://bit.ly/mcxAz6>

Swim Guide: Getting Started

Posted on June 9, 2011 by **Krystyn**



Last Update: Monday, June 20, 2011