

What to do if you become unwell

If you become unwell with vomiting, diarrhoea, or any other symptoms, seek medical advice and let them know you have been open water swimming.

Do not swim again until you have had no diarrhoea symptoms for at least 48 hours.

Further information and help

If you would like further information contact:

Health Protection Team
37 South Beach
Stornoway
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Tel: 01851 708033
Email: wi.healthprotection@nhs.scot

We are listening - how did we do?

We welcome your feedback, as it helps us evaluate the services we provide. If you would like to tell us about your experience:



- speak to a member of staff
- visit our website: www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/feedback or share your story at: www.careopinion.org.uk or tel. 0800 1223135
- tel. 01851 704704 (ext 2236) Monday-Friday between 10am-4pm.

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Disclaimer

The content of this leaflet is intended to augment, not replace, information provided by your clinician. It is not intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Reading this information does not create or replace a doctor-patient relationship or consultation. If required, please contact your doctor or other health care provider to assist you to interpret any of this information, or in applying the information to your individual needs.

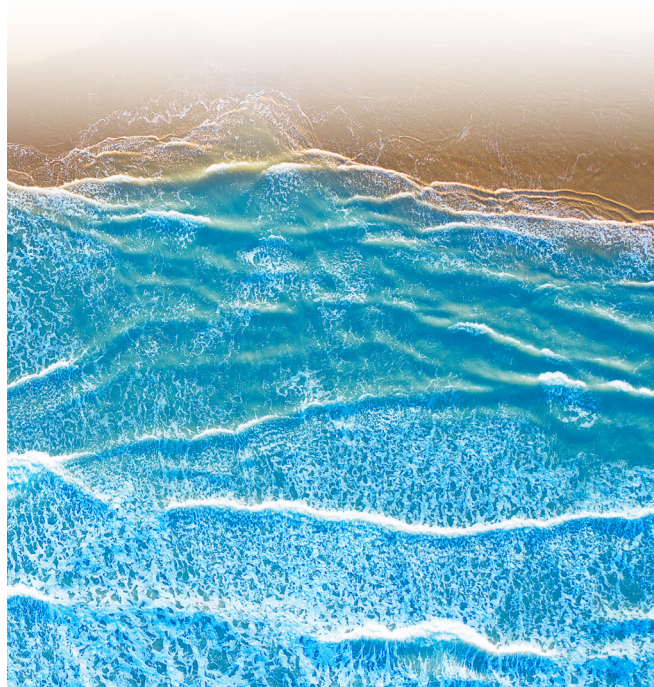
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SWIM HEALTHY

How to reduce the health risks of
open water swimming



What is open water swimming?

Open water swimming is a fantastic way to connect with nature, get great exercise and enjoy the freedom of lochs, rivers and the sea. But unlike swimming in a pool, natural water bodies can expose people to bacteria, pollution, cold temperatures, and strong currents.

What are the health risks?

Rivers and open water locations are not monitored for bacteria. They can contain levels of sewage, faeces from livestock and pollution from farming or industry, which are harmless to wildlife but would not be acceptable in designated bathing waters, where factors such as heavy rainfall can exacerbate the risks.

Illness and Infection risks

Toxic Algae - Some open water environments may have toxic algal blooms that can cause illness to humans and animals.

Pollution - Open water can be polluted by industrial or agricultural runoff, which can also pose health risks to swimmers.

Waterborne illness - Open water can contain microorganisms that cause gastrointestinal illnesses as well as skin, eye and ear infections.

Pathogens - Runoff from land can introduce pathogens like bacteria, viruses, and parasites into the water, increasing the risk of infection.

Pathogens such as Cryptosporidium, E. coli, Salmonella and Campylobacter are found naturally within the environment. However the risks of contracting infections where control measures are not in place is significantly higher.

How to reduce the risk of getting ill

Choose where and when to swim

- look for signs of water contamination – avoid swimming in water with blue-green algal (cyanobacteria) blooms or scums in fresh water.
- be mindful of shallow warmer bodies of water as they often breed blue-green algae.
- be mindful of where Scottish Water storm drains are located - more information available at: <https://www.scottishwater.co.uk/Your-Home/Your-Waste-Water/Overflows/Live-Overflow-Map>
- be aware of location of septic tank outfalls
- wait at least 48 hours after heavy rain in case of sewage overflow

Before you swim

- cover cuts, scratches or sores with a waterproof plaster
- wear appropriate protective clothing such as a wetsuit, gloves or protective footwear

While you are swimming

- try to avoid swallowing or splashing water into your mouth
- observe local safety advice
- wear bright colours that can easily be spotted in open water

After swimming you can minimise the risk of becoming ill by:

- cleaning your hands thoroughly with soap and water, removing all sand from hands before eating or handling food
- thoroughly cleaning cuts or abrasions using soap and water, before applying a waterproof plaster
- handling your wetsuit with care after use. Clean your wetsuit and swimsuit with detergent and rinse as advised by manufacturer
- do not do multiple swims in one day without rinsing your swimsuit or wetsuit in between.