

How to reduce the health risks of OPEN WATER SWIMMING



Eileanan Siar
Western Isles

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.

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.