Water quality at South Boston’s Carson Beach meets swimming standards nearly all of the time.

Beach Posting Program

Water quality at Carson Beach is monitored throughout the swimming season in compliance with Massachusetts Department of Public Health beach monitoring requirements, approximately from Memorial Day to Labor Day of each year. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation manages the beach posting program at Carson Beach, displaying blue flags at the beach when bacteria levels meet single sample limits (less than 104 counts of Enterococcus per 100 mL of water), and red flags when bacteria levels fail to meet the limit. Red flags are also flown following extreme weather events. The main source of high bacteria levels at Carson Beach in dry weather is from animal waste (usually birds and dogs). After heavy rain, high bacteria levels can also be caused by stormwater runoff or combined sewer overflows (CSOs). However, these overflows are rare, as MWRA’s South Boston CSO storage tunnel, completed in 2011, has virtually eliminated CSO discharges to Carson Beach in all but the largest storms (those storms that occur, on average, only once every 25 years).

Historical Beach Water Quality and Rainfall

Enterococcus is a bacterial indicator of human and animal waste in marine waters, and its presence helps environmental managers determine if conditions might present a public health risk to swimmers. In addition to the single sample standard above, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requires that long-term Enterococcus levels are below a long-term standard of 35 counts per 100 mL of water in all recreational swimming areas. Long-term averages at Carson Beach have historically been well below this threshold, even in seasons with heavy rain.