

Water Quality Assessment Policy

Policy type	Year	Approved by
MTSCT Operational	2023	Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust – Co-Directors/Poutokomanawa

For all MTS programmes

The purpose of this policy is to give clear direction for water quality decision making following the recent unprecedented rain and weather events around Aotearoa.

Background

The hazard of human infection for those exposed to the water has been known for a long time, but the public is becoming more aware of it as new evidence of the oceans and freshwater environments rapidly deteriorating health emerges. Even the most pristine waters are inhabited by large numbers of microbes. The sheer volume of fresh and seawater and its constant movement usually dilute foreign microbes below concentrations necessary for human infection.

Risk of direct infection by microbes from freshwater and seawater is very small. However, the risk increases significantly in warm, brackish waters, in waters proximate to sewage and run-off inlets, at places of animal access, at populated beaches and after extreme weather events (heavy and prolonged rain). Microbes generally infect humans through ingestion, inhalation or mucous-membrane exposure (naturally occurring or in wounds) Also refer to EMR sanitisation policy.

This policy covers both marine and freshwater

Water quality checklist

Making your weather assessment will lead to your water quality assessment call.

- Weather assessment calls are made via internet search such as Met Service, Windy and swell maps appropriate to the site to determine information on wind direction, wind speed, rain, temperature, visibility and swell. Weather assessment MUST be recorded on pre-site assessment form.
- Staff are to avoid contact and taking others into contact with water within 2 days of heavy or prolonged rain. If in doubt, stay out!
- Check 'Can I swim here?' on the LAWA website for the latest information lawa.org.nz/swim LAWA is the standard national website for our team to check to help make 'in office' water quality assessment calls.

- Water quality assessment calls MUST be recorded on pre-site assessment forms.
- In the absence of adequate site information to make a call, perform our own MTS testing
- Following heavy and prolonged rain, check access to your site is safe.
- Use local Facebook community pages and/or local contacts to help with visual assessments on the morning of field trip to avoid unnecessary travel if unsure.
- Follow the advice of any safety and warning signs from authorities.
- Once on site, Use senses - smell, sight, signage.
- Don't enter the stream/ocean if you notice potentially toxic algae in the river or lake, or if the water is murky/smells unpleasant.
- Avoid activities near potential contamination sources such as pipes, culverts, and flocks of birds
- Check for dynamic hazards such as blockages, underwater objects, stinging jellyfish and potentially toxic algae.
- Recommend frequent washing of hands/or hand sanitiser (before entering and on completion of the activity)
- Avoid wounds having contact with the water following recent heavy or prolonged rain events.

Regional and national coordinators train coordinators on how to make water quality assessments as part of their endorsement training (local conditions knowledge).

Document ALL decisions regarding weather or water quality on pre site assessment form.

This policy overrides any other existing policy in the EMR and WBC 2022 SOP manuals
Operational Policy - Water Quality - 28th February 2023 onwards