

Portstewart – Bathing Water Profile

Portstewart beach, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland



Bathing Water Profiles are designed to help the public make an informed choice before bathing, providing detailed information on the physical characteristics of each bathing water as well as assessing the pollution risk to each site. They are a requirement of The Quality of Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 and are reviewed in line with these regulations.

Historical and Current bathing water compliance classifications for Portstewart can be found at – [Bathing Water Compliance](#)

There is general advice not to bathe during or up to 48hrs after heavy or prolonged rainfall.

Description Portstewart bathing water is a popular tourist destination located on the north coast of Northern Ireland. The beach is comprised entirely of sand, backing onto an extensive sand dune system which runs the length of the 3km long beach. The dune system on the western side of the beach stretches back to the River Bann and on the eastern side the sand dunes overlap into a golf course and end at a rocky outcrop with minor cliffs leading to the town of Portstewart. The dunes have been designated an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and are within the Bann Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The National Trust manages the bathing water and owns both the upper beach and the approach road which is the principal access point. The River Bann flows out to the sea at the western end of the beach through the Barmouth (Map 1). The river runs primarily through agricultural land but does pass through a number of towns including Coleraine, which may indirectly affect the bathing water.

Site Details Local council area – Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Year of designation – 1988

Water sampling location – Lat 55.17148, Long -6.73155

Potential Pollution and measures to reduce impact on site:

The potential sources of pollution have been split into three categories; wastewater (sewage) treatment works discharges, wastewater systems in urban areas and rural source pollution, including agriculture. DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division work with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and other departments to identify and resolve sources of pollution.

Wastewater (sewage) treatment works discharges.

There is a major wastewater treatment facility between Portrush and Portstewart, with an outfall approximately 1km off the coast of Portstewart. This treated outfall is approximately 4km from Portstewart bathing water. The works treats wastewater from the wider Portrush, Portstewart and Coleraine areas.

Wastewater systems in urban areas.

Portstewart is a popular seaside location attracting large numbers of visitors during the summer season. This urbanisation is a potential source of pollution, especially during periods of prolonged/heavy rainfall.

In the event of prolonged/heavy rainfall the wastewater system may become overwhelmed leading to an overflow/discharge of wastewater. **This is why there is general advice not to bathe during or up to 48 hours after prolonged/heavy rainfall.**

The collection and treatment of wastewater has the potential to cause pollution as all combined collection systems are designed to overflow in periods of extreme wet weather or following failure of the system. This prevents overflows into residential properties. Within the Portstewart area there are combined sewer overflows (CSO), emergency overflows and wastewater pumping stations with associated emergency overflows, highlighted on Map 1.

There is also the potential for misconnections between the sewer system and surface drains, which may allow untreated wastewater to enter the water environment. Misconnections are not obvious, but when these become apparent NIEA pursues them as pollution incidents.

Rural source pollution – agriculture

The wider catchment area inland of Portstewart has a significant amount of improved grassland containing neutral grass and arable horticulture. Areas within the catchment where agriculture is the dominant land use may be subject to inputs from chemical fertilisers and organic wastes. Prolonged periods of rainfall can cause surface runoff of these organic wastes, such as animal slurries, contributing to the bacteria content in the water environment.

Septic tanks also have the potential to cause localized pollution, but there is no evidence to suggest that this is impacting Portstewart bathing water.

Other potential sources of pollution.

- Dogs
- Horses
- Litter
- Fly tipping

Management measures:

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017, take an integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of the water environment. River Basin Management Plans (RPMP) are produced which detail all of Northern Ireland's water quality objectives and a programme of measures to achieve these objectives. Within these 'Programme of Measures' in each River Basin Management Plan are a number of measures which relate directly to the protection of bathing waters.

Portstewart bathing water is located in the Neagh Bann River Basin District. You can find more information about the Neagh Bann River Basin Management Plan below:

[Draft 3rd cycle River Basin Management Plan for Northern Ireland 2021-2027](#)

Within the River Basin Management Plan programme of measures there are several schemes to address sources of pollution:

- Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) 2019-2022
- Knowledge Advisory Service (KAS)
- Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS)
- Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS)

Macro-algae, phytoplankton, and cyanobacteria (blue-green algae)

Portstewart bathing water may be subject to the presence of Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae). Blue-green algal blooms which form in Lough Neagh can be transported via the River Bann and affect the bathing water at Portstewart. Blue-green algae can be toxic, and harmful if swallowed and may cause skin rashes. If the presence of blue-green algae is confirmed the public shall be informed, and if levels exceed health guidelines the public will be advised not to bathe through signage at the bathing water and through relevant local media posts. More information can be found at [Blue-Green Algae Infographic | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/blue-green-algae-infographic)

What should I do if I see a pollution incident?

If you see a water pollution incident, you should immediately contact NIEA through the **24 hr** Emergency Water Pollution Hotline:

Phone: 0800 807060

When pollution is reported or found to be affecting the water quality of a bathing water, an immediate investigation is instigated. All possible sources of pollution are checked and the bathing water is monitored until the effects of the incident have passed. During this time, bathing waters may be temporarily closed (by local authority or controlling body) until the water quality has improved and levels of bacteria are within mandatory standards.

Contact details

For general information about bathing waters:

DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division, 17 Antrim Road, Tonagh, Lisburn, BT28 3AL
Email: Marine.InfoRequests@daera-ni.gov.uk
Website: [DAERA Bathing Water Quality](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/bathing-water-quality)

Local Authority Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Address: Cloonavin, 66 Portstewart Road, Coleraine, BT52 1EY
Email: info@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk
Phone: + 44 (0) 28 7034 7034
Website: [Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council](https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk)

Bathing Water Operator National Trust, 118 Strand Road, Portstewart, County Londonderry, BT55 7PG
Email: portstewart@nationaltrust.org.uk
Phone: 028 7083 6396
Website: [Portstewart Strand | Northern Ireland | National Trust](https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/portstewart-strand)

Map 1. Portstewart Bathing Water



1:40,000

0 0.38 0.75 1.5 2.25 3 Kilometres