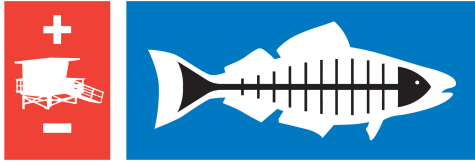


BEACH REPORT CARD



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STATE'S BEACH WATER QUALITY CONTINUES TO RISE

Drought's silver lining: 95% of beaches get A or B grade in Heal the Bay report

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Thursday, May 26, 2016) – Californians heading to the shoreline this Memorial Day weekend will be heartened by yet another gain in water quality at beaches statewide, according to data released today by environmental group Heal the Bay in its 26th annual Beach Report Card.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 456 beaches along the California coast for three reporting periods in 2015-2016, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution. Some 95% of beaches received A or B grades during the high-traffic summer season (April-October 2015). That figure is slightly above the statewide five-year average.

Overall, only 12 of the 456 beaches (3%) monitored statewide received D or F grades during summer dry weather, when most beachgoers typically use the ocean. High bacteria counts at these sites are linked to such potential illnesses as stomach flu, ear infections, and major skin rashes.

To avoid illness, ocean-goers can check the latest water quality grades at their favorite beaches, based on the latest samples, each week at beachreportcard.org.

Heal the Bay also urges beachgoers to swim at least 100 yards away from flowing storm drains and piers, and avoid enclosed beaches, especially in wet weather.

Southern California placed five beaches on Heal the Bay's annual Beach Bummer List, which ranks the top 10 most polluted shorelines in the state. Northern California held three Bummer spots, while Central California is home to two of the most polluted beaches statewide. Cowell Beach in Santa Cruz County has the dubious honor of being named to the No. 1 spot on the Beach Bummer List for the third consecutive year.

On a more positive note, 34 beaches in the state were named to Heal the Bay's Honor Roll, meaning they were monitored year-round and scored perfect A+ grades every week of the year, regardless of dry or rainy conditions. San Diego County boasted the most beaches on the Honor Roll, with 14 sites earning top marks.

For the full Beach Report Card and information on the Top 10 Bumpers and Honor Roll beaches across the state, visit healthebay.org.

While low rainfall totals have led to significantly improved water quality statewide, it should be noted that California often swings from extended dry periods to shorter periods of intense, wet weather.

In response, Heal the Bay's policy staff is advocating for public funding measures to build infrastructure projects that capture, cleanse, and reuse stormwater rather than dumping it uselessly into the sea. Progressive city planning, smart public infrastructure, and so-called Low Impact Development in the private sector would turn a nuisance into a much-needed resource.

“In a time of severe drought, it's madness to send billions of gallons of runoff to pollute the sea when we could be capturing and cleansing that water for daily use,” said Leslie Griffin, Heal the Bay's water quality scientist and co-author of this year's report with James Alamillo. “The rains will return, and when they do, we need to capture this valuable resource to maximize our local water supplies and keep polluted water out of our ocean.”

While beach water quality grades may be higher in a given year due to less runoff, the results should not provide a false sense of security about long-term improvements at chronically impaired beaches. When the rains come, poorer grades often follow.

Nearly one in four monitored beaches in California received F grades for wet weather in the report, a figure that raises public health concerns for the state's growing legion of year-round surfers, paddle-boarders, and divers. The marked seasonal difference in water quality is why Heal the Bay recommends that ocean-users avoid the water for at least three days after a storm.

Most of the California coastline earned A grades throughout the summer reporting period. Some 86% of L.A. County beaches received A grades for the summer. Beaches in Orange County earned A's at 94% of locations. San Diego County also scored very well, with 86% of its monitored sites earning A marks in the summer.

However, L.A. County had the most beaches on the overall Top 10 Beach Bummer List, with three highly polluted sites. San Diego and Orange Counties also had one Bummer each.

Moving up the coast, 100% of Ventura County beaches earned A grades in the summer, while 85% of beaches in Santa Barbara County received top marks. Nearly nine in 10 San Luis Obispo County beaches notched A's. Some 74% of Santa Cruz beaches scored A summer grades, but it had two beaches receive F grades. Monterey County beaches, which had a few underperforming sites in last year's report, earned 100% A grades in the latest summer reporting period.

Further north, 82% of San Mateo County beaches scored A grades, but it also had two beaches with a grade of D or F during the summer reporting period. Some 77% of San Francisco locations received A grades for the summer in the report, dragged down by pockets of pollution at bayside beaches. Marin County and Sonoma Counties each had 100% of beaches earn an A summer grade. Mendocino and Humboldt Counties earned mixed grades.

Heal the Bay to forecast water quality

This summer Heal the Bay, Stanford University, and UCLA will expand their pilot program to test the effectiveness of new predictive beach water-quality tools. Using sophisticated statistical models, environmental data, and past bacteria samples, the scientific teams are aiming to accurately predict when beaches should be posted with warning or open signs.

Promising early results last year at three pilot beaches (Arroyo Burro Beach, Santa Monica Pier Beach, and Doheny Beach) indicated that agencies may be able to post a warning notice immediately at pollution-impacted beaches rather than waiting one to two days for bacteria testing. These new models will protect public health by providing more timely and advanced water quality information to public health officials. This summer, Heal the Bay will add two more beaches to the predictive modeling program – East Beach in Santa Barbara and Belmont Pier in Long Beach.

About the Beach Report Card

All county health departments in California are required to test beach water quality samples for three types of indicator bacteria at least once a week during the summer season. Many counties also monitor heavily used beaches year-round. Heal the Bay compiles the complex shoreline data, analyzes it, and assigns an easy-to-understand letter grade.

The summary includes an analysis of water quality for three time periods: summer dry season (April through October 2015), winter dry weather (November 2015 through March 2016) and year-round wet weather conditions. The grading methodology is endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board.

A FAQ section, methodology, weekly grade updates, as well as historical grades can be found at **www.beachreportcard.org**.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of SIMA and the Swain Barber Foundation

About Heal the Bay

Now in its 31st year, Heal the Bay is dedicated to making Santa Monica Bay and Southern California watersheds and coastal waters safe and healthy for people and marine life. It is one of the largest nonprofit environmental organizations in Los Angeles County, with more than 15,000 members.

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