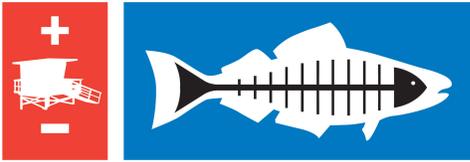


BEACH REPORT CARD



1444 9th Street
Santa Monica CA 90401
Phone: (310) 451-1500
Facsimile: (310) 496-1902
www.healthebay.org

MIXED GRADES FOR BAY AREA BEACH WATER QUALITY

Report: 95% of beaches get A or B in summer; Cowell still top 'Bummer' in state

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. (Thursday, May 26, 2016) – San Francisco Bay Area beaches that face the ocean continue to provide excellent water quality for summer swimmers, according to the 26th annual Beach Report Card®, which the environmental group Heal the Bay released today.

In a less positive trend, Northern California is home to four of the state's 10 most polluted beaches based on levels of harmful bacteria monitored annually. For the third year in a row, Cowell Beach at the wharf in Santa Cruz County has the dubious honor of being named to the No. 1 spot on the Santa Monica-based nonprofit's Beach Bummer List.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F grades to 68 beaches in San Francisco, San Mateo, Alameda, Contra Costa and Marin counties for three reporting periods in the 2015-2016 report, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution.

From Marin to San Mateo, 38 out of 40 ocean-side beaches (95%) received an A summer grade in the report. That figure is 2% higher than the five-year average for beaches west of the Golden Gate Bridge during the high-traffic summer periods (April to October).

The severe drought now impacting California was a major contributing factor to improved water quality at Bay Area beaches during the last spring-summer reporting period. With record low rainfall reducing the amount of polluted runoff funneled into our seas, scores rose yet again.

The Beach Report Card is a comprehensive evaluation of coastal water quality based on weekly samples taken from sites along the entire west coast of the U.S. A poor grade means beachgoers face a higher risk of contracting illnesses such as stomach flu, ear infections, upper respiratory infections and skin rashes than swimmers at cleaner beaches.

To avoid illness, Heal the Bay urges beachgoers to check the latest water quality grades, based on the latest samples, each week at beachreportcard.org

Bayside beaches – those facing the San Francisco Bay -- had lower grades overall. Some 24 out of 28 bayside beaches (85%) received an A or B grade for the summer time period, but swimmers faced worrying pockets of pollution in San Mateo and San Francisco counties. Three bayside beaches received D grades for summer: San Mateo's Pillar Point Harbor (end of Westpoint Avenue) and San Francisco's Sunnydale Cove near Candlestick Point.

Besides Cowell Beach, three other Northern California sites were repeat offenders on this year's Beach Bummer list for annual pollution levels: Clam Beach County Park near Strawberry Creek (Humboldt County), Sunnyside Cove at Candlestick Point (San Francisco County) and Pillar Point at the end of West Point Ave. (San Mateo County).

At Cowell, work is underway to install steel bird fencing to prevent roosting at the pier, which hopefully will help reduce at least one source of pollution at this popular beach. And at Clam Beach, officials suspect changes at the once-dammed Strawberry Creek for increasing bacterial pollution. A beaver dam used to hold back the flow of polluted water, fouled by apparent failing private septic systems upcreek. Sunnyside and Pillar Point both suffer from poor water circulation, which has been linked to high levels of harmful bacteria.

When El Nino-related storms deluged the Northern California this past winter, beach water quality dropped dramatically. Some eight beaches received a failing grade during rainy weather. That development is troubling for the region's sizeable number of year-round surfers, paddleboarders, divers and other ocean-users. Excessive storms have historically led to combined sewer discharges of undertreated sewage into the Bay.

Up north, all seven monitored beaches in Sonoma earned A+ summer grades in the report. Mendocino's six monitored beaches received A grades as well. Humboldt County scored very mixed grades, with two As, two Cs and an F. Del Norte's lone monitored beach received an A grade.

(For a detailed look at beach results for each county and report methodology, please refer to our complete report. A PDF version is available at beachreportcard.org.)

"With at least 15 million visitors to state park beaches from Monterey to Sonoma last year, it's encouraging that Northern California water quality has continued to improve during the peak summer season," said James Alamillo, a water quality scientist and co-author of the report. "However, pockets of pollution remain so always check Heal the Bay's weekly grades online to make sure you keep you and your family safe."

For a look at water quality and beach conditions in San Francisco County alone, check out the "SF Beaches" app, managed by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.

Heal the Bay reminds beachgoers to avoid enclosed beaches, and to swim at least 100 yards away from flowing storm drains and piers. Swimmers should wait at least three days after rainfall before entering the ocean.

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 results from last year’s pilot at three 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.

Contacts: Nick Colin, Heal the Bay, (415) 425-8316, ncolin@healthebay.org
James Alamillo, Heal the Bay, (310) 936-5489, jalamillo@healthebay.org

Partners: Ross Duggan, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, RDuggan@sfgwater.org
Jean Walsh, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, 415-554-3203,
JWalsh@sfgwater.org

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