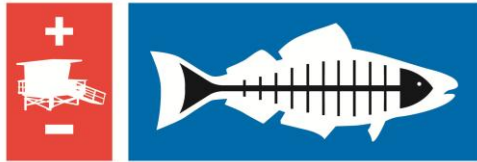


BEACH REPORT CARD



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STATE'S SUMMER BEACH WATER-QUALITY ON THE RISE

93% of beaches get A or B grade in Heal the Bay's bacterial pollution report

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Thursday, May 24, 2012) – California beachgoers this summer can be heartened by an uptick in already very good-to-excellent water quality statewide, according to the 22st annual Beach Report Card, which was released today by environmental group Heal the Bay.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 441 beaches along the California coast, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution reported from April to October 2011. Some 407 beaches, or 92%, received A or B grades. That figure marks a 2% increase from the last year's Report Card, due in large measure to improved grades in Los Angeles County. (Year-round grades and other details can be found in the full report.)

Overall, only 25 of the beaches (6%) 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.

Los Angeles County once again leads Heal the Bay's annual Beach Bum List, with seven locations in the ranking of the state's 10 most polluted beaches. Avalon Beach on Southern California's Catalina Island, troubled by outdated and leaking sewers, claimed the No. 1 spot.

On the positive side, San Diego, Orange and Ventura counties once again had superb water quality in dry summer. Central and Northern California ocean beaches also continued their trend of outstanding water quality in dry weather, save for some troubled spots in Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties.

In general, open ocean beaches with no known pollution sources have excellent water quality during summer dry weather, with a five-year trend of 98% A grades. Other beach types, such as stormdrain impacted or enclosed beaches are more inconsistent.

The Beach Report Card is a comprehensive evaluation of coastal water quality based on daily and weekly samples taken from sites along the entire U.S. Pacific Coast. 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.

Heal the Bay urges beachgoers to check the latest water quality grades each week at www.beachreportcard.org, based on the latest samples. Before heading to the shoreline, visitors can also access the latest-water grades on the go by downloading Heal the Bay's free app for mobile devices.

The disparity between dry and wet weather water quality in California continues to be dramatic, underscoring many municipalities' inability to significantly reduce stormwater runoff pollution. During wet weather in 2011-12, 36% of California's monitoring locations received fair to poor grades (C to F). Some 22% earned F grades, posing significant health risks to year-round ocean users, such as the state's sizable surfing community.

This marked seasonal difference in water quality is why Heal the Bay and California's public health agencies recommend that no one swim in recreational waters during, and for at least three days after, a significant rainstorm. With the exception of educational programs, there have been no major efforts made by public agencies along the coast to target reductions in fecal bacteria densities in storm water.

Numerous California beaches vied for the "Beach Bummers" crown this year. Seven of the 10 most polluted beaches in the state this past year were in Los Angeles County.

Top 10 California Beach Bummers

1. *Avalon Harbor Beach on Catalina Island (Los Angeles County)*
2. *Cowell Beach (Santa Cruz County)*
3. *Puerco Beach at the Marie Canyon storm drain (Los Angeles County)*
4. *Surfrider Beach (Los Angeles County)*
5. *Dan Blocker County Beach at Solstice Creek (Los Angeles County)*
6. *Cabrillo Beach harborside (Los Angeles County)*
7. *Doheny State Beach at San Juan Creek outlet (Orange County)*
8. *Poche Beach (Orange County)*
9. *Escondido State Beach (Los Angeles County)*
10. *Topanga Beach (Los Angeles County)*

Los Angeles County beaches still lag the state average, with only 82% of beaches getting an A or B grade during summer dry weather.

However, most of the California coastline earned excellent grades in summer dry weather. Beaches in Orange County earned summer dry grades of A or B at nearly 95% of locations. San Diego County also scored well, with 97% of its monitored sites earning top marks. However, troubling sewage plumes from the Tijuana River estuary and an inordinate amount of pollution spills still plague the county.

Moving up the coast, 93% of Santa Barbara, 100% of Ventura and San Luis Obispo beaches earned A or B grades during summer dry weather.

Oceanside beaches in San Mateo and San Francisco Bay beaches had excellent water quality, while bayside beaches in Alameda and Contra Costa were generally good. Three chronically polluted beaches in San Francisco showed marked improvement, but pockets of pollution linger on harborside beaches in San Mateo County.

Marin, Sonoma and Mendocino counties all earned perfect 100% A grades during their summer testing period.

Uncertain Funding for Beach Monitoring

High marks provide optimism, but looming uncertainty about ongoing funding of weekly beach water quality testing statewide raises concerns. County monitoring agencies continue to feel the effects of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2008 line-item veto of state beach monitoring funds.

County monitoring agencies continue to feel the effects of then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2008 line-item veto of state beach monitoring funds. The governor axed funds that supported the collection and processing of ocean water samples as well as the posting of signs to notify swimmers of potential health risks.

In response, the State Regional Water Quality Control Board now has the discretion to allocate fees up to \$1.8 million towards beach water quality monitoring. This year, the state only approved \$1 million to fund the entire beach monitoring program. The shortfall will seriously affect the number and frequency of sites tracked throughout the year.

To safeguard the health of beachgoers, Heal the Bay makes the following recommendations to state and national beach water quality regulators. Details in report.

- Strengthen the EPA's soon-to-be revised beach water quality criteria, not weaken them.
- Implement year-round monitoring of popular beaches statewide
- Incorporate numeric pollution limits in all stormwater permits
- Adopt statewide regulations of septic systems, which can leak bacteria into receiving waters.

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 www.beachreportcard.org.

About the Beach Report Card

All county health departments are required to test beach water quality samples for three types of indicator bacteria at least once a week during the summer season. Heal the Bay compiles the complex shoreline data, analyzes it and assigns an easy-to-understand letter grade. We analyzed 650 beaches in California, Oregon and Washington based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution reported from April 2011 through March 2012.

The summary includes an analysis of water quality for three time periods: summer dry season (April through October), winter dry weather (November 2011 through March 2012) and year-round wet weather conditions. The grading methodology is endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board.

Heal the Bay's interactive microsite contains an FAQ section, methodology, weekly grade updates as well as historical grades. www.beachreportcard.org.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of The Diller – von Furstenberg Family Foundation, simplehuman, LAcarGUY, SIMA, and Grousbeck Family Foundation

About Heal the Bay

Now in its 27th year, Heal the Bay makes 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 13,000 members.

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