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DO CALIFORNIA BEACHES MAKE THE GRADE?

Heal the Bay releases annual bacterial-pollution grades and Top 10 Beach Bummer list

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Wednesday, June 26, 2019) – California beach water quality sagged slightly in 2018-19, driven in large part by increased rainfall, according to the 29th annual Beach Report Card that the environmental-advocacy nonprofit released today. Heal the Bay assigned A-to-F letter grades for California beaches in the 2018-19 report, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution in the ocean measured by county health agencies.

Only 54% of the beaches received an A or B grade during wet weather, which is an eight percentage point decrease from the state's five-year average.

While scientists remain deeply concerned about water quality issues, there is some good news for beachgoers. 94% of the 500 California beaches monitored by Heal the Bay received an A or B grade for the busy summer season. During the dry winter season, 87% of beaches received an A or B grade.

Overall, **33 California beaches made it on Heal the Bay's coveted Honor Roll this year**, which is lower than last year (37) likely due to higher than average rainfall. To make it on the Honor Roll the beach must be monitored year-round and score perfect A+ grades each week in all seasons and weather conditions.

10 California beaches made it on Heal the Bay's dreaded Beach Bummer List, which ranks the most polluted beaches in the state based on levels of harmful bacteria.

No. 1 – San Clemente Pier, Orange County San Clemente Pier was one of two Orange County beaches to make the Beach Bummer list this year. San Clemente Pier last appeared on this list in 2016. This beach is impacted by untreated runoff from a nearby storm drain.

No. 2 – Clam Beach County Park, Humboldt County This chronic Beach Bummer is on the list for the sixth straight year. The beach is impacted by flows from Patrick Creek and Strawberry Creek. Private septic systems located nearby are also potential sources of bacterial pollution.

No. 3 – Linda Mar Beach, San Mateo County Making a second consecutive appearance on the Beach Bummer list, this Pacific-side beach is impacted by polluted runoff during dry weather from nearby San Pedro Creek.

No. 4 – Long Beach City Beach at Coronado Ave., Los Angeles County This beach is making its first appearance on the Beach Bummer list. It's one of three L.A. County beaches on the list this year. At this location, beach water quality is negatively impacted by flows from the L.A. River.

No. 5 – Cowell Beach, West of The Wharf, Santa Cruz County This historically troubled spot makes the list for the tenth straight year. The local community is making steady improvements with the formation of a working group dedicated to addressing water quality.

No. 6 – Monarch Beach at Salt Creek, Orange County This spot last appeared on the Beach Bummer list in 2015 and is the second Orange County beach to make the list this year. Water quality is negatively impacted by untreated runoff from a storm drain on the beach.

No. 7 – Marina Del Rey Mother’s Beach, Los Angeles County This beach is making its fifth appearance on the list this year. The lack of waves makes it a popular spot for families with young children. But, the minimal water circulation causes bacteria and pollution to build up.

No. 8 – Cabrillo Beach, Harborside, Los Angeles County This beach has appeared on the list eight times in the last 10 years and is one of three L.A. County Beach Bumpers. Cabrillo Beach (harborside) is enclosed by a seawall and the absence of large waves makes it a popular beach for families.

No. 9 – Keller Beach, South Beach, Contra Costa County This spot is making its debut on the Beach Bummer list. Because it is enclosed, there is little water circulation. As a result, bacteria and other pollution do not get flushed away from the beach.

No. 10 – Aquatic Park, San Mateo County This beach was on the Beach Bummer list in 2014 and is back again this year. This spot, located in a channel within the San Francisco Bay, is even more cut-off from the open ocean than a typical enclosed beach.

Polluted ocean waters pose a significant health risk to millions of ocean users in California, who can contract a respiratory or gastrointestinal illness from one morning swim or surf session. Coming into contact with beach water that has a grade of C or lower greatly increases the risk of contracting illnesses such as stomach flu, ear infections, upper respiratory infections, and rashes.

- **Northern California Beaches** had excellent summer water quality on par with its five-year average of 94% A’s and B’s. Clam Beach in Humboldt County is the only NorCal beach on the Beach Bummer List. No NorCal beaches made the Honor Roll, in part because water quality monitoring doesn’t happen year-round.
- **Central California Beaches** (which includes San Francisco County) had great water quality during summer months with 92% of its beaches earning an A or B grade. Linda Mar Beach and Aquatic Park in San Mateo County are on the Beach Bummer list along with Cowell Beach in Santa Cruz County. Keller Beach South Beach is new to the Beach Bummer list. Five Central Coast beaches made the Honor Roll.
- **Southern California Beaches** had excellent yet slightly below average grades with 95% of the beaches receiving A’s or B’s for their summer dry grades. Five of the Beach Bumpers are from SoCal, including the troubled Cabrillo Beach (harborside) and Marina del Rey Mother’s Beach in L.A. County. 28 out of the 33 beaches on the Honor Roll are located in SoCal.
- **More Rain, More Runoff** The large amount of rain during the winter of 2018-2019 led to lower than average wet weather grades in 13 out of 17 counties in California. California often swings from extended dry periods to shorter periods of intense, wet weather. When rains do increase, as we saw in the 2018-2019 winter season, the State of California needs to do a better job of capturing, treating, and reusing runoff so it can be a resource, not a nuisance.
- **The Woolsey Fire** Heal the Bay investigated the impact of the Woolsey Fire on Malibu beaches and found that water quality grades decreased dramatically after the fire. Wildfires increase runoff due to

vegetation loss and infrastructure damage. As the effects of climate change are realized, we can expect more wildfires and more rainfall across coastal areas of California, which can have a negative impact on water quality and public health if no preventative actions are taken to protect our communities and natural habitats.

“A day at the beach shouldn’t make anyone sick,” said Dr. Shelley Luce, president and CEO of Heal the Bay. “We are glad to see water quality improving at some beaches, but there are no guarantees. Anyone headed to the shoreline should visit Heal the Bay’s new Beach Report Card with NowCast website and app to get the latest grades and predictions.”

For a detailed look at beach results by location, why some beach types are more vulnerable to higher levels of pollution, and detailed report methodology, please refer to our complete report. A PDF version of the 2018-19 annual Beach Report Card is available at <https://healthebay.org/beach-report-card-nowcast-2019/>

How to stay safe at the beach

- Check beachreportcard.org for latest water quality grades (available on [iOS](#) & [Android](#))
- Avoid shallow, enclosed beaches with poor water circulation
- Swim at least 100 yards away from flowing storm drains, creeks, and piers
- Stay out of the water for at least 72-hours after a rain event

About the Beach Report Card with NowCast

The annual Beach Report Card includes an analysis of water quality for three time periods: summer dry season (April through October 2018), winter dry weather (November 2018 through March 2019) and year-round wet weather conditions. The grading methodology is endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board.

All county health departments in California are required to test beach water quality samples for fecal 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.

This summer, Heal the Bay scientists will expand NowCast – a daily water quality monitoring service at 20 popular beaches in California – in addition to providing weekly water quality grades for 500 beaches statewide. Using sophisticated machine learning, environmental science data, and past bacteria samples, Heal the Bay accurately predicts each morning when beaches should be posted with warning or open signs because of potential bacterial pollution. These new models will protect public health by providing more advanced water quality information to public health officials and beachgoers.

Heal the Bay’s Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of SIMA Environmental Fund, Swain Barber Foundation, and Water Foundation.

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