



Heal the Bay

DO CALIFORNIA BEACHES MAKE THE GRADE?

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

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Tuesday, June 30, 2020) – California beach water quality improved slightly in 2019-2020, driven in large part by decreased rainfall, according to the 30th annual Beach Report Card that the environmental nonprofit released today. Heal the Bay assigned A-to-F letter grades for California beaches in the 2019-2020 report, based on levels of bacterial pollution in the ocean measured by county health agencies. Polluted ocean waters pose a significant health risk to millions of ocean users in California. People who come into contact with water that has a grade of C or lower are at a greater risk of contracting illnesses such as stomach flu, ear infections, upper respiratory infections, and rashes.

Rainfall across coastal counties in California was 12 percentage points lower than the historical average. Less rain means fewer pollutants, including bacteria, were flushed through storm drains and rivers into the ocean. Because of this pollutant flushing, only 65% of CA beaches received good or excellent grades during wet weather.

While scientists remain deeply concerned about water quality issues, there is some good news for beachgoers. **92% of the 500 California beaches monitored by Heal the Bay received an A or B grade for the summer season.** During dry weather in the winter season, 91% of beaches received an A or B grade, which was slightly better than average.

Overall, 42 out of more than 500 monitored California beaches made it on Heal the Bay's coveted Honor Roll this year, which is higher than last year (33) and the year before (37) likely due to lower than average rainfall. To make it on the Honor Roll the beach must be monitored year-round and score perfect A+ water quality grades each week in all seasons and weather conditions. Most beaches on the Honor Roll are in Southern California because many counties in Central California and Northern California do not sample frequently enough during the winter months.

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 in the ocean.

No. 1 – Fitzgerald Marine Reserve at San Vicente Creek Outlet (San Mateo County)
Fitzgerald Marine Reserve has never appeared on the Beach Bummer list before. The beach generally has good summer water quality, but is impacted by dry weather runoff from San Vicente Creek. This beach is one of six San Mateo County Beach Bumpers this year, which is unprecedented for one county.

No. 2 – Poche Beach at Creek Outlet (Orange County)
Poche Beach is no stranger to the Beach Bummer list, appearing on the list in 2018, 2013, 2012, and 2011. The beach is impacted by the Prima Deshecha Cañada storm drain (referred to as Poche Creek), which carries pollution into the ocean even during dry weather from the Dana Point area.

No. 3 – Pillar Point Harbor at Capistrano Avenue (San Mateo County)
Pillar Point Harbor at Capistrano Avenue is one of three Pillar Point Harbor Beach Bumpers this year. There are several storm drains that carry pollutants into the harbor in dry weather, and the seawalls around the harbor prevent pollutants from getting flushed away.

No. 4 – Foster City, Erckenbrack Park (San Mateo County)

Erckenbrack Park is a first time Beach Bummer; however, this area of the San Francisco Bay has had a known record of poor water quality. This beach lies within an engineered patchwork of enclosed channels that are impacted by dry weather runoff from the surrounding residential and commercial developments.

No. 5 – Topanga Beach at Creek Outlet (Los Angeles County)

A 2014 study found Topanga Lagoon as the likely source of bacteria pollution at Topanga Beach. The lagoon sees high amounts of bird and dog fecal matter. When breached, the fecal matter flows into the ocean resulting in high bacteria concentrations. Planning for a lagoon restoration is underway and could mitigate poor water quality.

No. 6 – Pillar Point Harbor Beach (San Mateo County)

Pillar Point Harbor Beach is the second of three Beach Bumpers contained within the Pillar Point Harbor. Unfortunately, it appears that the entire harbor was more polluted than in previous years.

No. 7 – Linda Mar Beach at San Pedro Creek (San Mateo County)

Linda Mar Beach is making its third consecutive appearance on the Beach Bummer list this year, and is one of six San Mateo County Bumpers. This beach is impacted by runoff during dry weather, which flows untreated into the ocean through San Pedro Creek.

No. 8 – Mission Bay, Vacation Isle North Cove (San Diego County)

Vacation Isle North Cove is an enclosed beach in Mission Bay that is impacted by dry weather runoff from the surrounding commercial and residential developments. Pollutants are not easily flushed away from this enclosed beach, which is located within a deep cove.

No. 9 – San Clemente Pier (Orange County)

San Clemente Pier is making its second consecutive appearance on the Beach Bummer list and is one of two Orange County Beach Bumpers this year. This beach is impacted by untreated dry weather runoff that flows into the ocean through a storm drain.

No. 10 – Pillar Point Harbor at Westpoint Avenue (San Mateo County)

Rounding out the Beach Bummer list is Pillar Point Harbor at Westpoint Avenue, which is the third Pillar Point Harbor Beach Bummer and one of six San Mateo County Beach Bumpers this year. Untreated dry weather runoff appears to be causing significant water quality problems in this enclosed harbor.

“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 Beach Report Card with NowCast website and app to get the latest grades and predictions.”

More findings in Heal the Bay’s Annual Beach Report Card:

- **The COVID-19 pandemic** has upended daily life around the world and has devastated households and communities. We must continue to practice physical distancing and other health and safety procedures, and to keep in mind that a large percentage of people can spread the virus without showing symptoms. The closure of beaches in many locations due to COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of beaches in our lives as open spaces for recreation, relaxation, exploration, and places to gather. But, COVID-19 has also exposed

major systemic failures; open spaces, including beaches, are not equally accessible to all people and the public health impacts of health crises as well as poor water and air quality are not shared equally across communities. Low-income communities of color tend to be the most burdened and vulnerable communities, bearing the brunt of environmental and economic impacts. As we plan for the future post-COVID-19, we can and must do better to protect everyone.

- **Heal the Bay is expanding the Beach Report Card to include three beaches in Tijuana, Mexico:** El Faro, El Vigia, and Playa Blanca. The popular beaches in Mexico, along with Imperial Beach in California, US, are impacted by millions of gallons of raw sewage that flow into the ocean through the Tijuana River. As a result, the public is at a greater risk for getting ill and local beaches are often closed for months on end. Heal the Bay is partnering with Proyecto Fronterizo de Educación Ambiental (PFEA) to help spread awareness about water quality in Tijuana. Margarita Diaz, Director of PFEA says, “Showing the integration of what is happening on both the US and Mexican portion of our watershed is a long overdue requirement for understanding environmental health issues, particularly as they relate to water quality in our shared watershed, given that they are intrinsically connected.”

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 PDF report at: <https://healthebay.org/beachreportcard2020/>

How to stay safe at the beach

- Check beachreportcard.org for latest water quality grades (app 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
- Wear a mask when not in the water and remain 6-feet away from people not in your household
- Follow all local health and safety regulations, and check in with the lifeguard on duty for more information about the best places to swim

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 2019), winter dry weather (November 2019 through March 2020), 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. 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. In addition to providing weekly water quality grades for more than 500 beaches statewide, Heal the Bay continues to expand NowCast, a daily water quality predictive service at 20 popular California beaches. Using sophisticated machine learning, environmental science data, modeling, and past bacteria samples, Heal the Bay accurately predicts when beaches should post warning signs due to potential bacterial pollution. This new approach enhances public health protections by giving more advanced water quality information to public health officials and beachgoers. Heal the Bay’s Beach Report Card is made possible through generous support from SIMA Environmental Fund, Swain Barber Foundation, and Sony Pictures Entertainment.

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