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For an Emerald Green, Ocean Blue Coronado

WATER QUALITY A YEAR IN REVIEW

The now ubiquitous yellow signs warning of sewage-contaminated water are a constant reminder of Coronado's polluted beaches and ocean. Water-quality data publicly available from the County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health and Quality documents the extent of the problem.

Most water-quality issues are not visible but are assessed by certified laboratory testing. In May 2022, San Diego County implemented a new EPA-approved water test called digital droplet polymerase chain reaction (ddPCR) to identify bacteria levels in water samples. The ddPCR test detects and measures bacteria and provides results within three to 10 hours.

The Environmental Protection Agency standard for safe water is 1,413 or fewer copies of the enterococci bacteria per 100 milliliters of water. Potential risks from exposure to water with high levels of enterococci bacteria, which is found in sewage, include rashes, ear infections, flu-like symptoms, urinary tract infections, and gastro-intestinal discomfort.

In 2023, bacteria counts along Coronado's shores ranged from a high of 1,109,136 to a low of 85 with an average count of 23,300. Unhealthy levels of bacteria were present more than 87% of the time in 2023 — that's 318 days out of the year.

2023 HIGHS AND LOWS

- May had the highest recorded bacteria levels with an average 67,799 bacteria count.
- March was the second-highest recorded month with an average 65,583 bacteria count.
- July showed the lowest bacteria count with an average of 2,548, which still exceeds the health standard of 1,413.

Water quality testing for Coronado occurs at six locations along the ocean (North Beach, Central Beach, Shores Beach and three Silver Strand locations) as well as two sites on the bay (Tidelands and Crown Cove). Silver Strand and Shores Beach are tested daily except holidays and after rain events. The county does not test after rain because it's automatically assumed that bacteria counts will be extremely high.

Other Coronado locations are tested most weeks.

Southerly locations tend to have higher bacteria counts. On average, bacteria counts at the Silver Strand guard shack were more than three times higher than the Shores.

BEACH NOTICES

Water bacteria levels determine status of beach advisories.

- **Open.** Bacteria levels in the water are within the state safe water standards. There is a very low risk of health complications from entering the water.

• **Advisory.** Bacteria levels exceed the state standard for safe water quality. Advisories are serious for young children or those with preexisting health conditions who are more susceptible to infections.

• **Warning.** A beach advisory with the addition of a south swell, indicating water is flowing north from Tijuana, which may contain sewage. Southern swells are more frequent in summer months.

• **Closure.** Known sewage, chemical, or other contaminant spill with a state-mandated closure. Closures can be issued before water quality testing results if sewage is seen or smelled at the beach and reported.

An advisory is also issued any time there is significant rain (more than 0.2 inches) as runoff into the ocean and bay increases bacteria contamination. Beachgoers should avoid contact with open waters for 72 hours after rainfall ends.

Daily water advisories or closures are posted on the county-run website sdbeachinfo.com. Coronado lifeguards post signs at beach access points if the water test results indicate an advisory, warning, or closure.

Detailed results of the bacteria counts are posted on the California State Water Resources Board website at waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/beaches/search_beach_mon.html



2023 WATER QUALITY DATA	BACTERIA COPIES AT:			
	CENTRAL BEACH	SHORES BEACH	SILVER STRAND	TIDELANDS PARK
LOW	85	331	503	451
AVERAGE	10,429	13,964	44,690	3,721
HIGH	247,575	560,434	1,109,136	25,590
% OF DAYS TESTED	57.0%	82.7%	82.2%	12.9%
% OF DAYS UNHEALTHY	53.4%	78.4%	87.4%	

State Health Standard = 1,413 bacteria copies or lower per 100 ml

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