



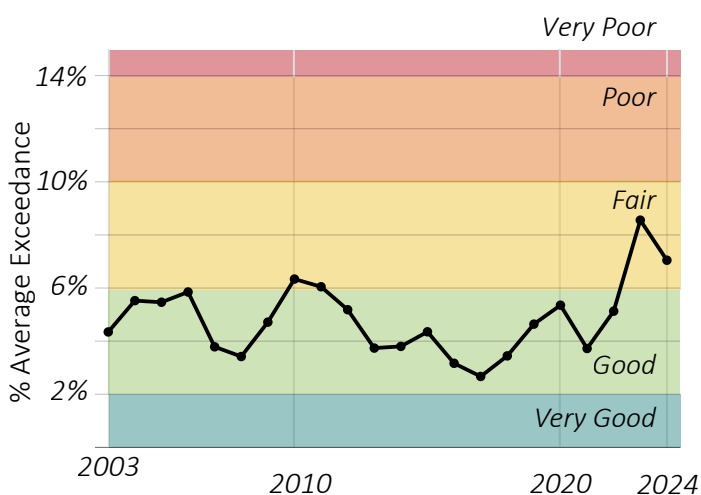
BEACH WATER QUALITY

California Coast and Ocean Report *Status, Progress, and What's Ahead* 2026

Every year, tens of millions of Californians swim, surf, and play in the ocean. Whether the water is safe depends on beach water quality, meaning how free coastal waters are from harmful bacteria and viruses that can cause illness. Poor water quality is closely linked to rainfall and runoff, which carry pollution from streets and farms into the sea. Routine monitoring and public reporting help people make informed choices about when and where it is safe to get in the water.

STATUS

Most California beaches are safe to swim with good water quality, aside from the last two years, when water quality was slightly worse due to heavy rainfall. However, California struggles with **known problem sites** (e.g., beaches close to storm drain outlets) where poor water quality can persist.



Based on the statewide average of Enterococcus bacterial counts exceeding the health safety standards, beach water quality has been relatively stable since 2003 with more recent years being slightly worse due to heavy rainfall.

PROGRESS

California now has one of the most sophisticated beach safety systems in the country. A first-of-its-kind forecasting model can predict contamination risks before water testing results are even available, giving swimmers advance warning on high-risk days. **Faster bacterial testing methods**, developed with state support, have also cut the time it takes to issue a beach advisory from days to hours. These tools are working: **public awareness and safety at problem beaches have measurably improved.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Climate change presents serious threats to coastal water quality, including from **increased extreme storms and wildfires**. Continuing to improve water quality will require **investments in improved stormwater management, sewage treatment infrastructure, and nature-based solutions** to filter contaminants.

SOURCES OF POLLUTANTS

Urban and agricultural runoff, sewage discharge, and animal waste are the main sources of the bacteria and associated pathogens that contribute to poor beach water quality. In most of California, rain washes these pollutants into storm drains that flow into the ocean. This leads to years with more rainfall having worse water quality than dry years

PROBLEM SITES WITH POOR BEACH WATER QUALITY

- Linda Mar Beach, Pacifica
- Santa Monica Pier
- Southern San Diego near the Tijuana River



HOW TO STAY SAFE WHEN THE WATER QUALITY IS POOR

- Check your local beach water quality before visiting the beach
- Avoid entering the water for 72 hours after rain
- Avoid swimming near flowing storm drains



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