

Clean Water, Great Life

An update on bay water quality from the Morro Bay National Estuary Program

The Morro Bay estuary is a special place that is central to many of our lives.

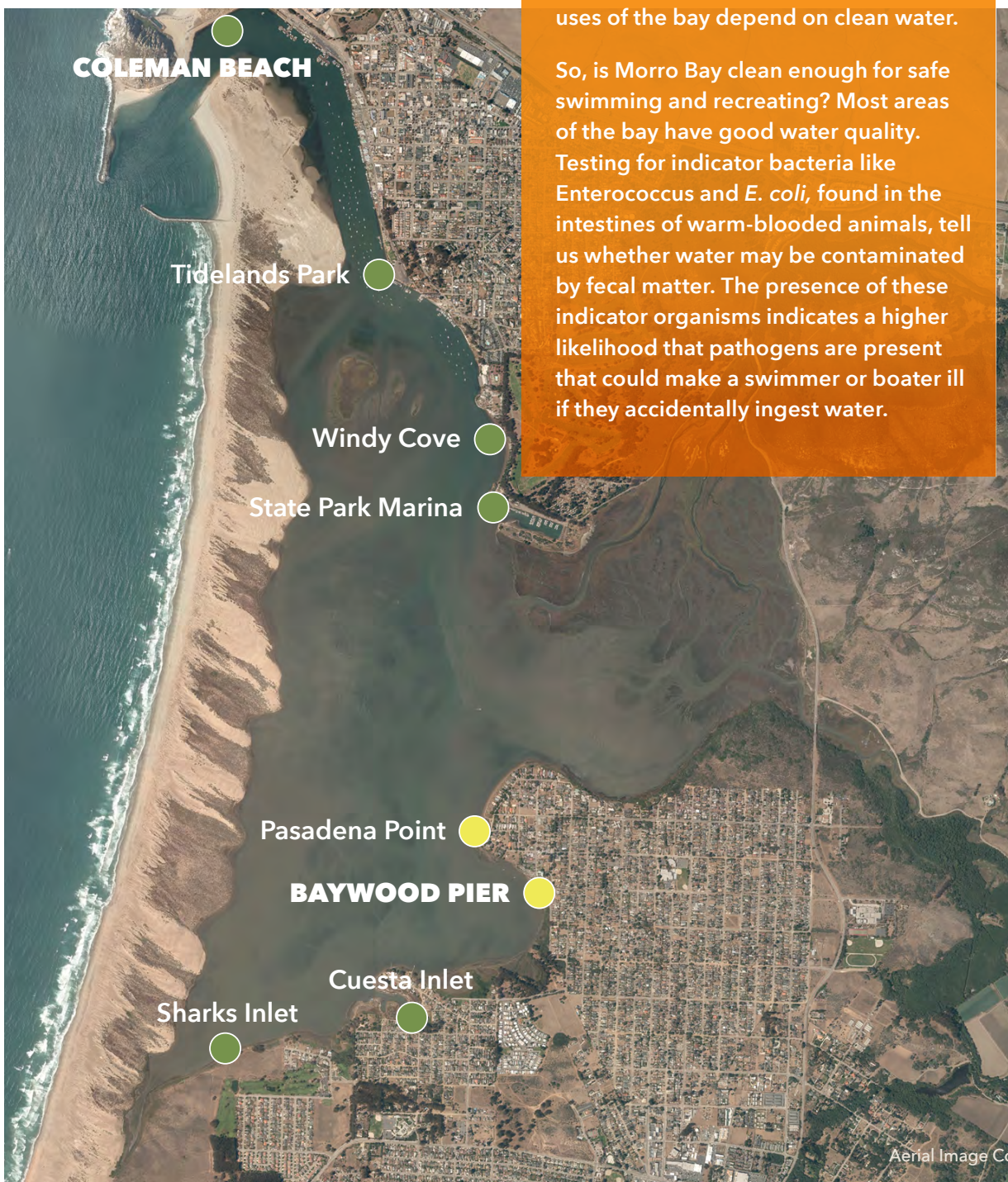
It is a wonderful place to live, work, or visit. Some of our livelihoods depend on the bay, such as the fishing industry or recreational boat rentals. Many of us enjoy paddling in the bay's calm waters or wading along the shore. All of these uses of the bay depend on clean water.

So, is Morro Bay clean enough for safe swimming and recreating? Most areas of the bay have good water quality. Testing for indicator bacteria like *Enterococcus* and *E. coli*, found in the intestines of warm-blooded animals, tell us whether water may be contaminated by fecal matter. The presence of these indicator organisms indicates a higher likelihood that pathogens are present that could make a swimmer or boater ill if they accidentally ingest water.



Each month, Estuary Program volunteers venture to sites throughout the bay and watershed to collect and analyze samples to determine if the waters are safe for swimming. The map shows the results from monthly testing of *Enterococcus* at eight sites along the bay shoreline. The analysis represents data from 2009 through 2014.

The green dots represent areas that typically have good water quality that is safe for swimming. The yellow dots indicate slightly elevated bacteria levels. At the two sites with a fair rating, the bacteria level for safe swimming was exceeded in 17% (Pasadena Point) to 21% (Baywood Pier) of samples tested.



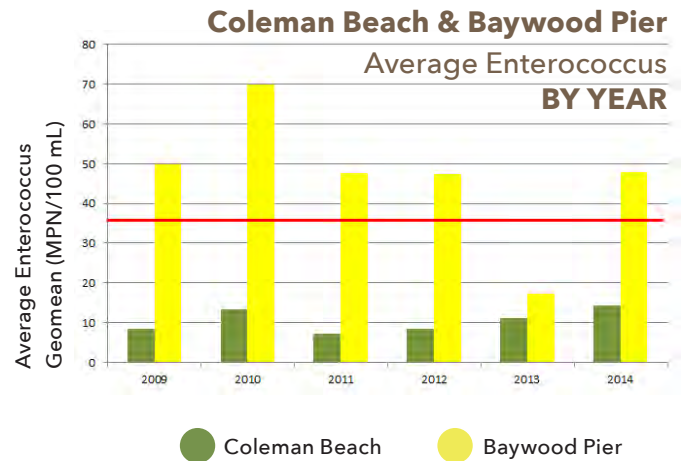
Aerial Image Courtesy of San Luis Obispo County

Is Morro Bay safe for swimming?

Yes, in most areas.

In the graph to the right, bacteria levels that are below the red line are safe for swimming. The green bars representing Coleman Beach are consistently below this level, while the yellow bars representing the average bacteria level at Baywood Pier are consistently above this level.

Even if a site has waters that test as safe for swimming, bacteria concentrations can be elevated following a rain storm. Heal the Bay, the environmental group that compiles the statewide Beach Report Card, advises staying out of the water for at least three days following a storm.



Much of the contamination impacting Morro Bay begins with human activities. Each of us can make a difference in keeping our estuary clean and healthy.

Making a Difference.

What can you do?

Pet owners

Pick up after your pet. Dog poop is not good fertilizer and can take up to a year to break down.

Car owners

Fix any leaks right away. Spilled automotive fluids wash into the bay during rainstorms.

Boat owners

Learn how to correctly use your Y-valve and find out where pumpouts are located, so you can empty your waste-holding tank safely.

Homeowners

If your home has a septic system, have your septic serviced regularly to ensure proper operation.

Gardeners

Don't over-fertilize your yard. Excess fertilizer washes away during storms and ends up in our bay.

Everyone

If your neighborhood has storm drains, remember that these drains transport untreated stormwater directly into the bay. Keep your storm drains clean and never use them to dispose of chemicals, yard waste, or pet waste.

Absorbents for containing oil & fuel spills are available from the Morro Bay Harbor Department's oil recycling center through a free exchange program.

Contact the Harbor Department
805.772.6254

CLEAN BOATING information, a map of waste & pumpout stations around the bay, plus more about your Y-valve are available in our **online library!**

The Morro Bay **MUTT MITTS PROGRAM** provides free bags for picking up pet waste around the bay in parks & recreation areas. **A map of the dispenser locations is available on our website!**

Our **BAYSIDE GUIDE** in our **online library** is a great resource for new & current residents alike. It provides more details and ideas for how to be a **good neighbor to Morro Bay** and make a difference with your everyday practices.

Photo by Central Coast Outdoors