



Continue Safe to Swim Monitoring (Central Valley Region)

What is it?

The Safe to Swim studies are designed to assess whether popular Central Valley swimming areas are safe for swimming and other water-related recreational activities. Initiated in 2007, these studies monitor the water quality of swimming beaches along rivers and lakes during the summer months. Water quality samples are analyzed for E. coli, an indicator of the potential risk of waterborne illnesses, as well as other constituents related to illness risk. The results are compared to State and Federal water quality objectives, criteria and guidelines established for safe water contact recreation. The studies include large-scale screening surveys as well as detailed, follow-up studies to investigate areas where prior monitoring results have indicated potential problems.

The Central Valley Water Board coordinates with local watershed groups to identify and monitor frequently used swimming beaches within their regions or areas of interest. As a result of these efforts, water quality samples were taken in more than 60 swimming locations in 2010. This included an intensive study at several frequented beaches at Lake Natoma (Sacramento County) and Folsom Lake (Placer County) conducted in June as well as a larger, region-wide study of popular swimming spots that was conducted over a five week period in August and September, 2010.

Why is it important to the State?

During the warm summer months many creeks, rivers and lakes of the Central Valley become popular locations for swimming and other water contact sports. The potential risks bathers face from illness due to waterborne pathogens is a public health concern. Ongoing efforts are required to evaluate water quality throughout the summer in order to identify areas of concern and prioritize them for clean-up actions.

Why is it important to me?

The Safe to Swim monitoring efforts are designed to improve understanding of the risk of illness bathers face at commonly used Central Valley swimming locations. With this knowledge, local residents can make informed decisions about entering the water at popular recreation spots. This program also increases public awareness of water quality issues by strengthening ties between the Central Valley Regional Board and local watershed groups.

How will this information be used?

Data gathered by this effort is used in the Clean Water Act Sections 305(b) and 303(d) Integrated Report, assessing Central Valley water quality and identifying areas impaired for the beneficial use of swimming/recreation. Additionally, data is being used to characterize spatial and temporal bacteria trends in the Central Valley surface waters, evaluate conditions in local swimming areas, and identify areas requiring further study. Waters where USEPA guidelines for bacteria counts are exceeded are reported to the California Department of Public Health.

For more information on the Safe to Swim studies go to: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/swamp/r5_activities/index.shtml