



San Luis Obispo County

Environmental Health Services

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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Environmental Health Services Rain Season Advisory

In anticipation of the approaching rainfall event, the San Luis Obispo County Environmental Health Services reminds residents about health issues associated with storm water runoff. Storm water is untreated rain water that flows through the drain system into creeks, the ocean and other waterways. Studies indicate that contact with storm water may increase the risk for certain types of illnesses such as rashes, fever, chills, ear infections, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Unlike the municipal sewer system, water carried by the storm drain system is not treated. To minimize potential health risks, it is recommended that people do not swim, play or surf in the ocean and creeks for at least three days following a rain event. If people do choose to swim during the rain or immediately following the rain, they should avoid areas near the outfall from drainpipes and creeks that enter the ocean. Beachgoers should also avoid discolored water, as this may indicate high pollutant levels.

Sport harvesters should wait until at least 10 days after a significant rain to harvest shellfish. High bacterial levels, pesticide, herbicide and motor oil grease flushed into the ocean with the storm runoff may contaminate the shellfish beds. When raw or undercooked contaminated shellfish is eaten, serious illnesses such as gastroenteritis, septicemia, salmonellosis, and hepatitis may result. Adequate cooking of shellfish will destroy harmful bacteria, but may not be effective in killing viruses. In addition, cooking does not eliminate chemical and metal pollutants in the shellfish.

The County of San Luis Obispo implements a variety of programs to protect public health and enhance environmental quality of County watersheds and beaches. Working to improve water quality by reducing or treating sources of pollution is a multi-faceted task.