

Water quality at Sarasota Bay is improving, an environmental group says

WUSF Public Media - WUSF 89.7 | By **Cathy Carter**

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A new report by the [Sarasota Bay Estuary Program](#) indicates that water chemistry in the bay is generally good.

For most areas of the bay there was an increase in water transparency -- an important component for the development of healthy seagrass.

Dave Tomasko, Director of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, acknowledges that the news may seem counterintuitive due to the recent loss of seagrass beds.

“And that's because the seagrasses disappear faster than they reappear,” he said. “So, it's a lot easier to lose 2,000 acres of seagrass than it is to recover it. But you can't get seagrass to recover unless you get your water quality right first.”

In 2021, the environmental group created a health [report card](#) to track water quality conditions in each of the bay's five segments.

It found improvement, despite lingering impacts from severe red tides in 2016 and 2018 and Hurricane Irma in 2017.

Researchers used four measurements to assess conditions. To create the report card, they compared the indicators in a given year to a reference period of time from 2006-2012 when water quality and seagrass coverage was generally good across all bay segments.

The most notable recovery is in the southern part of the bay.

Tomasko, attributes the improvement to better management of wastewater.

“We had problems with overflows from a wastewater treatment plant in prior years that was hundreds of millions of gallons of high nutrient wastewater,” he said. “That hasn't happened in a while. Local governments and their partners have really stepped up their game and so we're seeing big improvements in terms of how we treat wastewater, how we treat stormwater.”

Tomasko says water quality in the upper part of Sarasota Bay has also improved. But recovery of seagrass beds there will take longer due to losses caused by discharges from the Piney Point phosphate plant, along with earlier red tide events.

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Cathy Carter

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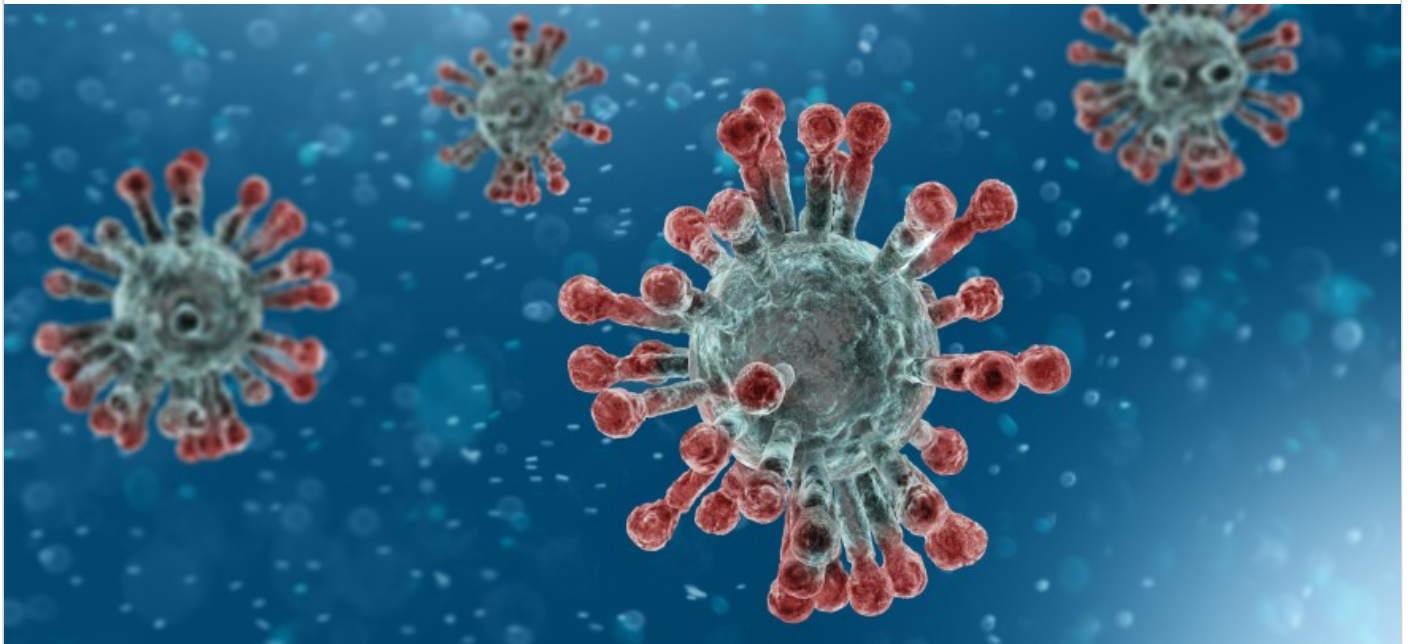


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