DMR uses a membrane filtration (MF) method for fecal coliform analysis using mTEC agar with a two-hour resuscitation step. The geometric mean and the 90th percentile are calculated on a minimum of the most recent 30 data points.

**Geometric Mean (Geomean):**

The geometric mean, or geomean, is a type of averaging calculation. Unlike a simple average or arithmetic mean, the geomean takes into account the way bacteria grow. During bacterial growth, each bacterium doubles and reproduces itself i.e. one bacterium becomes two, two bacteria become four, four become eight and so on. There are low values at first and the rate of growth increases as the number of colonies increases. This is called exponential growth (Figure 1). This growth pattern means a fecal coliform dataset may have a few high scores and many low scores. The calculation for the geometric mean takes exponential growth into account by transforming the data into logarithms, taking the mean and then converting the number back to a log base 10 number. For example, the arithmetic mean of a fecal coliform score of 300, 150, 23 and 2 CFU/100ml is 119 CFU/100ml. Calculating the geomean, the result is 38 CFU/100ml.



**Figure 1.** The graph illustrates exponential growth. The arithmetic mean for the scores is 18.1 while the geomean is 8.

**90th Percentile (P90)**

The other calculation used for shellfish growing area classification is the 90th percentile (P90). The P90 is the variability standard, meaning this value takes into account the variability of test readings. In any test measurement, successive readings of the same sample would produce slightly different scores each time due to precision of the equipment, human error, etc. This type of variability is a factor of the test method and equipment used and is true of all testing methods.

To account for the variability in the fecal coliform test, a standard has been established. Here again, since bacteria grows exponentially, the calculations are performed on a logarithmic scale. The P90 is based on the distribution of fecal coliform scores and means that 90% of scores are at are below the P90 and 10% scores are above (Figures 2a and 2b). As long as most of the other scores are low, a few high scores will not have a large impact on the P90 value. The P90 standard is the acknowledgment by the NSSP that a few high scores in data set may be due to the variability of the test method. If the area shows high fecal coliform scores intermittently due to pollution events such as rainfall, this may cause water quality to exceed the P90 standards because the shellfish are intermittently subject to polluted waters. For classification determinations, P90s are rounded to the nearest whole number. 0.1-0.49 are rounded down and 0.5-0.9 are rounded up to the next whole number.



**Figures 2a and b.** The lower 90% of the scores fall to the left of the P90 line and 10% of the scores fall to the right. 2a has a low P90 because there are many low scores and a few high scores. 2b has a larger number of high fecal coliform scores, so the P90 is shifted to the right. Although the geomean of 2b passes the approved standard, the area would not be classified as approved because the P90 score is above the threshold.

### Fecal Coliform Standards by Shellfish Growing Area Classification Category

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Shellfish Growing Area Classification** | **Activity Allowed** | **Geometric mean FC/100ml** | **90th Percentile (P90) FC/100ml** |
| Approved | Harvesting allowed | ≤ 14 | ≤ 31 |
| Conditionally Approved | Harvesting allowed except during specified conditions | ≤ 14 in open status | ≤ 31 in open status |
| Restricted | Depuration harvesting or relay only | ≤ 88 and >15 | ≤ 163 and >31 |
| Conditionally Restricted | Depuration harvesting or relay allowed except during specified conditions | ≤ 88 in open status | ≤ 163 in open status |
| Prohibited | Aquaculture seed production only | >88 | >163 |