# University Boat Race faces E.coli health warning amid sewage concerns



Crews participating in the University Boat Race today are being cautioned about a significant risk of exposure to high levels of E.coli bacteria in the River Thames. This warning follows alarming findings from environmental group River Action UK, which disclosed that almost a third of E.coli samples taken from the river indicated water quality results nearly three times lower than acceptable standards.

With severe rainfall expected overnight, concerns have escalated that increased sewage outflows could elevate health hazards. Amy Fairman, a spokesperson for River Action, expressed serious concern about the event's timing, stating, "With heavy rain forecast, there's a real risk the Thames will once again be flooded with sewage—just as rowers and spectators gather for one of the river's most iconic events." Fairman highlighted a recent incident involving a burst sewage pipe located upstream of the event's finish line, which was discharging raw sewage directly into the racecourse.

River Action has urged the winning crew of the boat race to reconsider the traditional celebration of throwing their coxswain into the river, given the current health risks. Fairman remarked, "How much more evidence do Thames Water and regulators need before they act? The health of our rivers, our communities, and the athletes on the water is on the line."

The health implications associated with the boat race have drawn attention from various clean water advocates. Giles Bristow, the chief executive of Surfers Against Sewage, commented on the situation, stating, "Today's Boat Race throws the sewage crisis into sharp focus and foreshadows what holidaymakers will likely experience over Easter - polluted water that puts their health at risk." He called for significant reform within the government's management of the water industry.

The organisers of the Boat Race have implemented a series of precautionary measures aimed at safeguarding the health of the athletes. These measures include guidance on covering open wounds, regular handwashing, the provision of a cleansing station at the finish area, and increased awareness of the risks associated with entering the water.

Today's race, which marks the 170th men's race and the 79th women's race, has not been devoid of controversy. Recent disputes surfaced when Oxford University Boat Club raised concerns regarding the eligibility of three Cambridge rowers—Matthew Heywood, Molly Foxell, and Kate Crowley—citing that they were not enrolled in conventional degree programmes, but rather in teaching diplomas. Following these complaints, an independent panel ruled that the trio would not be permitted to compete.

In response to the situation regarding water quality, a spokesperson from Thames Water confirmed that they are investigating reports of sewer discharges into the Thames. They stated, "We have carried out the repair on our foul water sewer and have also finished re-lining the surface water pipes," and assured that measures are in place to mitigate further discharges, alongside ongoing testing until all works are completed. Thames Water claims to be investing a record amount into upgrading its ageing infrastructure, with £1.8 billion allocated to improve river health in London over the next five years.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://news.sky.com/story/concerning-levels-of-e-coli-found-in-river-thames-before-boat-race-campaigners-say-13344981> - This URL corroborates the findings of high E. coli levels in the River Thames, highlighting concerns raised by environmental campaigners ahead of the Boat Race. It also mentions previous incidents where rowers fell ill due to water contamination.
* <https://newsgpt.ai/2025/04/09/e-coli-river-thames-boat-race-water-quality-concerns-rise/> - This URL further supports the claims of unsafe water quality in the Thames by detailing that almost 30% of E. coli samples exceeded safe limits, which would classify the water quality as 'poor' if it were a designated bathing area.
* <https://putney.news/2025/04/10/river-action-raises-alarm-over-thames-pollution-ahead-of-boat-race/> - This URL reinforces the concerns about Thames pollution by highlighting River Action's findings and the group's call for government intervention. It also mentions recent sewage issues upstream of the Boat Race finish line.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This URL is the source of the original article describing the issues with water quality affecting the Boat Race and associated health risks.
* <https://www.vacourts.gov/courts/scv/rulesofcourt.pdf> - This URL does not directly support the claims about the Boat Race or E. coli levels in the Thames but provides information on legal procedures, which might be relevant for any legal actions stemming from environmental concerns.