# Serious health complications arise from swimming in polluted UK waters



A woman in the UK developed serious health complications after swimming in polluted waters, highlighting growing concerns over sewage spills, which reached a decade high last year. The individual, identified as Suzi Finlayson, a 42-year-old mother and an enthusiastic sea swimmer, required open-heart surgery following a severe infection linked to her swimming activities in Bognor Regis. She fell critically ill after contracting a blood infection known as infective endocarditis, which resulted in a six-week hospital stay and ongoing health challenges. Ms Finlayson stated, “This experience has completely changed my life,” emphasising the profound impact on her family and the financial strain incurred from being unable to manage her business.

The campaign group Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) reported a striking number of illness cases in its annual Water Quality Report, with 1,853 sickness reports registered through their service app in 2024. Of those, 331 individuals sought medical attention, while 79 per cent of cases were attributed to sewage pollution by healthcare professionals. Diagnoses included gastroenteritis, chest infections, and severe bacterial infections, with some patients requiring hospitalisation. The collective impact of reported illnesses resulted in an estimated loss of nine years' worth of sick days, equating to a cost of approximately £493,200 to the UK economy.

In 2024, sewage was discharged into British waterways 592,478 times over a staggering 4.7 million hours. This figure represents a significant failure by the water industry to meet its pollution reduction targets, recording 2,489 spills—more than double the count set by the Environment Agency. The report raises alarms regarding the operational conduct of private water companies, who collectively paid out £1.2 billion to shareholders while failing to rectify ongoing issues.

Moreover, Charlie Clarke, a 28-year-old who became violently ill after swimming at Clevedon Marine Lake in September 2023, also reported similar health issues. Following his swim, he collapsed and underwent extensive medical tests that revealed a virus contracted from the water had caused a significant drop in his blood pressure and a minor cardiac episode.

The SAS highlights that the reported cases likely represent only a fraction of the true scale of the problem, given that sickness reports are collected solely via app usage. In a survey of 2,000 adults, it was found that 27 per cent of respondents had contemplated not paying their water bills due to dissatisfaction with the actions of their water suppliers. Additionally, only one-third of participants believed their water supplier would implement necessary measures to eliminate sewage pollution.

The situation arises concurrently with forthcoming increases in water bills across England and Wales, projected to rise by up to 47 per cent, with customers set to pay an additional £160 by 2030 compared to 2024 pricing.

In light of these developments, the government and the Independent Water Commission are undertaking a review of the privatised water industry, with the deadline for a public call for evidence set for 23 April. The report issued by SAS calls for stricter accountability for regulators and water companies, demanding greater transparency regarding finances and the prohibition of financial rewards for non-compliance with regulations.

Giles Bristow, the CEO of SAS, expressed significant concern about the water industry’s performance, stating, "The water industry fails, fails and fails again and yet is permitted to come up smelling of roses," amid the ongoing sewage pollution crisis affecting the nation’s coastlines, rivers, and lakes. He urged for fundamental reforms, advocating a model focused on localised management rather than the prevailing 100 per cent private ownership system, which he characterised as detrimental to public health and the environment.

In response, a spokesperson from Water UK acknowledged the system's failings and expressed support for the Independent Water Commission's investigations. They asserted that while no sewage spill should be deemed acceptable, substantial investments of £12 billion into the water infrastructure aim to reduce storm overflow spills by nearly half by 2030. This funding represents the largest financial commitment to enhancing the natural environment and addressing the critical need for improved water management practices.

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