# Concerns over E.coli contamination cast shadow over University Boat Race



Participants in today's University Boat Race, one of the UK's most prestigious rowing events, have been alerted to a significant health risk concerning E.coli levels in the Thames. The warnings come following recent data from River Action UK, which reported that nearly one-third of the E.coli samples taken from the river indicated contamination levels almost three times above acceptable limits.

The event, which features crews from the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, is set against a backdrop of heavy rain forecasts. There is considerable concern that the anticipated downpours will exacerbate the situation with swollen sewage outflows potentially releasing more contaminants into the already compromised waters, increasing the risk faced by rowers and spectators alike.

Amy Fairman, a spokesperson for River Action, expressed the gravity of the situation, stating to the Mail On Sunday: "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.” She noted a recent incident involving a burst sewage pipe upstream of the finish line, which resulted in raw sewage pouring directly into the racing course.

In light of the findings, River Action has cautioned today's winning crew to reconsider the traditional post-race celebration of tossing their cox into the river, urging athletes to prioritise health considerations. Fairman also expressed frustrations directed at Thames Water and regulatory bodies, questioning how much more evidence is necessary for action to be taken to protect the health of rivers and communities.

The chief executive of Surfers Against Sewage, Giles Bristow, echoed these concerns, highlighting the potential implications for public health as the Easter holiday approaches: "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 said.

In response to these health concerns, the Boat Race organisers have implemented precautionary measures aimed at safeguarding the participants. These measures include guidance on covering open wounds, ensuring regular handwashing, and establishing a cleansing station at the finish area. The organisers also emphasised the importance of communicating the risks associated with entering the water.

This year's race, marking the 170th men's and 79th women's event, has not been without its share of controversy off the water. Recently, Oxford University Boat Club expressed grievances over the eligibility of three Cambridge rowers—current students engaged in teaching diplomas rather than traditional degree programmes. Such concerns led to the independent panel blocking their participation in the race.

Thames Water has responded to the criticisms regarding sewage discharges, asserting that they have investigated reports of a sewer discharge near Ship Alley and undertaken repairs to address the issue. A spokesperson for the company stated: "We have carried out the repair on our foul water sewer and have also finished re-lining the surface water pipes. Mitigation will remain in place to ensure there are no further discharges at this location and will continue testing until we have completed the work." They also conveyed the ongoing commitment to enhancing river health, revealing a significant £1.8 billion investment plan allocated for London over the next five years.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://news.sky.com/story/concerning-levels-of-e-coli-found-in-river-thames-before-boat-race-campaigners-say-13344981> - This article supports the claim about concerning levels of E.coli in the River Thames and the concerns raised by River Action regarding water quality before the Boat Race.
2. <https://newsgpt.ai/2025/04/09/e-coli-river-thames-boat-race-water-quality-concerns-rise/> - This article corroborates the information about E.coli levels in the Thames being a concern and the impact on the Boat Race, highlighting similar warnings about water quality.
3. <https://putney.news/2025/04/10/river-action-raises-alarm-over-thames-pollution-ahead-of-boat-race/> - This news piece confirms the findings from River Action regarding E.coli levels and raises concerns about sewage monitoring failures in the area.
4. <https://www.noahwire.com> - The source article provides context for concerns about sewage and E.coli levels in the Thames before the Boat Race, though it is not directly accessible to corroborate specific details.
5. <https://www_CHANGE_here.com> - Unfortunately, there is no available URL to support the exact statement regarding heavy rain forecasts and its potential impact on sewage outflows during the Boat Race. However, general weather forecasts often discuss such possibilities.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/university-boat-race> - While not directly linked to E.coli concerns, this general source provides background information on the Boat Race, which is relevant to the context of the event.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14603547/Oxford-Cambridge-University-Boat-Race-Thames-e-coli-bacteria.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data