# Fewer than one in five UK adults confident in swimming safely by 2030 amid rising sewage pollution



Recent concerns over water quality in the UK have reached alarming levels, as a significant poll reveals that fewer than one in five adults feel confident about swimming safely in UK waters by 2030. According to the research conducted by Surfers Against Sewage, over half of Britons fear that pollution from sewage could lead to illness. This sentiment is prevalent among regular beachgoers, many of whom have encountered the grim realities of swimming after heavy rainfall or during reported sewage discharges.

One such individual is Kate Jones, who has repeatedly faced health issues after swimming off the Pembrokeshire coast. Following a contaminated surf session, her husband fell ill, highlighting a personal tragedy that mirrors a larger trend. "Sometimes on my day off I meet people for a swim and there’s been several occasions where there has been brown scum along the shoreline, pretty much every time it rains," she lamented.

The statistics are troubling: in Wales alone, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water recorded over 118,000 sewage discharges in 2024—an average of one every five minutes. Alarmingly, across England during the bathing season, more than 8,700 sewage discharges were logged, which translates to more than 60 incidents daily. This has prompted growing calls for transparency and accountability within the water industry.

On 17 May, as part of their annual Paddle Out event, thousands will gather at various beaches across the country to protest against ongoing sewage pollution. This demonstration, timed to coincide with the start of the UK's official bathing season, seeks to raise awareness about the health risks associated with contaminated waters. Stuart Davies, who is involved in the Brighton Pier Paddle-Out protest, voiced his frustration: “We see record levels of sewage pollution in our blue spaces, especially here on the south coast. It makes me extremely angry."

The urgency of the situation is further underscored by a recent report from Surfers Against Sewage, which documented 1,853 reported cases of illness linked to sewage pollution in 2024. Notably, 331 individuals required medical attention, and a staggering 79 per cent of those reported illnesses were traced back to sewage contamination. Diagnoses included gastroenteritis and serious bacterial infections, some necessitating hospitalisation.

Giles Bristow, CEO of Surfers Against Sewage, emphasised the public's growing frustration in light of the water industry's failures. "Another year, another summer of swimming and surfing in sewage while our shameless water companies laugh all the way to the bank," he stated. He pointed out that rather than achieving a targeted 40 per cent reduction in incidents, water companies have seen a shocking 30 per cent increase in pollution events.

Despite promises of substantial investment to clean up the industry, Bristow argues that the data reflects broken commitments and a clear disregard for public health. He expanded on the broader implications for safety, indicating that the ongoing saga of sewage contamination demonstrates an urgent need for comprehensive reform in the water system, calling for lightning-fast action to rectify these persistent issues.

The forthcoming Paddle Out protests are poised to amplify these sentiments, taking place in major locations such as Brighton, Bournemouth, and Broad Haven Beach, as well as in Dunbar, Scotland, and Portrush, Northern Ireland. The movement aims not only to highlight the threats posed by water pollution but also to advocate for a future wherein individuals can freely enjoy the natural beauty of the UK's waters without fear of illness.

As this crisis unfolds, the need for accountability and reform within the water industry remains paramount, with the health and wellbeing of the public hanging in the balance.

### Reference Map

1. Core focus: Public concerns over swimming safety in UK waters due to sewage pollution.
2. Kate Jones’ personal experiences and statistics on sewage discharges in Wales.
3. Details on the Paddle Out protest and the sentiments of Stuart Davies.
4. Overview of illness reports and statistics from Surfers Against Sewage, highlighting CEO Giles Bristow’s comments on industry failure.

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

## Bibliography

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-water-pollution-sewage-illness-b2750778.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data