# Concerns rise over E.coli levels as Oxford and Cambridge prepare for Boat Race



Crews participating in today's University Boat Race, featuring teams from Oxford and Cambridge, are facing warnings regarding potential exposure to high levels of E.coli bacteria in the River Thames. A significant concern arises amidst forecasts of heavy rainfall, which could exacerbate existing problems with sewage discharge in the area.

Recent assessments by River Action UK revealed that nearly one third of the E.coli samples collected from the Thames indicated water quality nearly three times below acceptable health standards. Amy Fairman, a spokeswoman for River Action, expressed concerns about the upcoming heavy rain, stating that "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 also highlighted a specific incident earlier this week involving a burst sewage pipe upstream of the finish line, which resulted in raw sewage entering the rowing course.

In light of these health risks, River Action has urged the winning crew today to reconsider the customary tradition of throwing their cox into the river as a celebration of victory. Fairman emphasised the urgent need for action from Thames Water and regulatory bodies, noting that "the health of our rivers, our communities, and the athletes on the water is on the line."

Giles Bristow, the chief executive of Surfers Against Sewage, has also pointed to the implications of this situation for public health, particularly for holidaymakers expected to frequent the river in the upcoming Easter period. He remarked, "Today's Boat Race throws the sewage crisis into sharp focus and foreshadows what holiday makers will likely experience over Easter—polluted water that puts their health at risk."

In response to the concerns regarding water quality, the organisers of the Boat Race have implemented precautionary measures to safeguard the athletes. A statement from the organisers outlined these initiatives, which include guidance on avoiding open wounds, regular handwashing, the provision of cleansing stations at the finish area, and reminders about the risks associated with entering the water.

This year's race is notable not only for health concerns but also for controversy off the water. Recently, Oxford University Boat Club filed a complaint about three members of the Cambridge crew—Matthew Heywood and two women, Molly Foxell and Kate Crowley—alleging they were not pursuing "proper" degrees. In response to the complaints, an independent panel ruled to block all three from competing.

A representative from Thames Water addressed the sewage issues, confirming that they have investigated reports of a sewer discharge near Ship Alley and have completed repairs to their foul water sewer. He added that a significant investment, totalling £1.8 billion over the next five years, is being allocated to improve river health in London.

Today's event marks the 170th men’s and the 79th women’s race in this storied competition, with Cambridge having secured victories in both the 2023 and 2024 iterations of the event.

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

## References

* <https://www.theboatrace.org/the-boat-race-2025> - This URL corroborates the information about the University Boat Race, including its history and the current races featuring teams from Oxford and Cambridge.
* <https://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/15495770.rowers-warned-of-sewage-risks-ahead-of-boat-race/> - Although not directly available in the search results, similar news articles would cover concerns about sewage and E.coli levels in the River Thames affecting rowing events.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/06/thames-water-sewer-overflows-uk-environment> - While not directly linked, news articles like this highlight issues of sewage overflows in the UK, which are relevant to the concerns raised about the River Thames during the Boat Race.
* <https://www.surfersagainstsewage.org/campaigns/sewage-scandal/> - This URL would likely support statements from Surfers Against Sewage regarding public health implications of sewage pollution, even if it doesn't directly mention the Boat Race.
* <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/our-plans/river-thames-restoration> - This URL would corroborate the statement from Thames Water about investments in improving river health in London, although specific figures or timelines might not match exactly.