

Bathing water season begins in Devon and Cornwall

- Coastal areas will be tested regularly to check water quality
- Water users can check the water quality forecast on on the [Swimfo: Find a Bathing Water](#) website.

The bathing water season started yesterday (15 May) with the Environment Agency carrying out regular testing of water quality at designated bathing sites across Devon and Cornwall until the end of September.

High standards of water quality at swimming locations are important for everyone's enjoyment of beaches across the south west. Throughout the bathing season the Environment Agency will issue warnings of any forecasted pollution risk on its [Swimfo](#) website.

Signs are also put up at these swimming locations to inform bathers about any possible dips in quality as a result of factors like rainfall, wind and high tides.

In the autumn Defra will publish its classifications – Sufficient, Good, Excellent or Poor – for each designated bathing water site.

Bruce Newport, Devon and Cornwall Area Environment Manager said:

For the first time ever, 100% of designated bathing waters in Devon and Cornwall passed the water quality standards last year – with 98% gaining an 'Excellent' or 'Good' rating.

This is great for Devon and Cornwall as it gives people so much choice on where they can safely bathe this summer.

Our beaches are 100% compliant, but we are not complacent, there is more to be done to ensure cleaner and healthier waters for people to enjoy.

Whilst the sea washing onto our bathing beaches is very clean, we are aware that streams running across beaches can contain harmful bacteria. We do not regularly measure the quality of these streams and would ask everyone to be careful if you choose to bathe in these areas. If we are made aware of pollution events into our stream locations we work with the Councils to make people aware.

Since the 1990s, the Environment Agency has driven £2.5 billion of investment and facilitated partnerships to bring about the change needed to make our bathing waters a success story. The long-term trend for bathing water quality in England remains upward and overall quality is high.

In 2021 99% of bathing waters achieved the minimum standard of Sufficient. Of these, almost 95% achieved the highest standards of Excellent or Good – the highest since new standards were introduced in 2015. But while progress has been made, there is still much more to be done to ensure cleaner and healthier waters for people to enjoy.

Environment Agency Chair Emma Howard Boyd said:

Before the pandemic, coastal tourism in England generated £13.7 billion, supported 10,000 tourism related jobs, with 15 to 20 percent of employment in coastal locations linked to tourism – in some places over 50 percent. Public confidence in bathing water quality is key to the tourism industry as well as people's health and wellbeing. We monitor sites and provide pollution risk forecasting at over 170 sites throughout the bathing water season so people understand the local situation.

Targeted regulation and investment over several decades on the coast have driven significant improvements to bathing waters, but there is work to do inland. Water companies, industry and farmers need to meet regulatory requirements or face legal action, and there are small steps we can all take to help. For example by never flushing away wet wipes or plastic products like nappies so they don't end up in the water.

Designation does not guarantee clean water for swimming. Bringing rivers up to bathing water standards will be a challenge and places greater responsibility on farmers, water companies and communities to remove pollution that is harmful to swimmers.

The EA is calling on them to play their part and working hard with all those who want to be part of the solution. And individual actions count: small steps such as not pouring fats and oils down the sink or flushing wet wipes and other plastic products down the loo can help to protect water quality.

Knowing more about bathing water quality and the range and location of designated sites can help people get the most out of their visit. The EA's [Swimfo: Find a Bathing Water](#) website provides immediate access to information on over 400 designated bathing waters and notifies bathers when Pollution Risk Warnings have been issued. including coastal locations, inland lakes and the newly designated section of Wolvercote Mill Stream at Port Meadow in Oxford.

- During the bathing season (15 May to 30 September) the Environment Agency monitors the water quality for sources of pollution known to be a risk to bathers' health, with up to 20 samples taken from each site during the bathing seasons. Each sample is tested for bacteria, specifically E.coli. and intestinal enterococci.
- The sampling program is set ahead of the start of season and follows a strict protocol to ensure samples are taken consistently both in terms

of location and depth of water, and also covering a range of tidal states where safe to sample.

- Bathing water designation takes into account any facilities that are provided to promote and support bathing (for example, lifeguarding, first aid facilities, public toilets, shops and cafes) because the presence of such facilities demonstrates the site is an established bathing area and is managed for bathing.