

GUIDANCE ON ROWING WHEN WATER QUALITY IS POOR

WHAT IS 'POOR WATER QUALITY'?

When we talk about poor river water quality we are referring to the chemicals or microorganisms that don't naturally occur in the river, usually from sewage or agricultural run-off in the water. This toxic discharge poses threats to both wildlife and human health.

Our rivers face an imminent threat of ecocide, with only 15% meeting 'good ecological status'.



WHY DO WE MONITOR THE LEVELS OF PHOSPHATES, NITRATES AND ECOLI IN THE WATER?

Phosphates and nitrates are chemical compounds that are found in fertilisers, and when introduced to rivers can cause ecological problems.

Alongside phosphates and nitrates, the presence of E. coli tells us there is pollution in the river, possibly from sewage. E. coli is a microorganism that gives us a good indication that there are harmful bacteria and viruses in the water.



MITIGATIONS TO TAKE WHEN WATER QUALITY IS POOR:

- Cover all cuts, grazes and blisters with waterproof dressings if the water is contaminated.
- Wash or shower after any significant contact with water from the river, lake, canal, or sea, especially if there are any exposed cuts or grazes
- Clean all cuts and grazes thoroughly
- Take care not to swallow water that splashes close to your mouth. If water is swallowed refer yourself to a health care professional with full details of the incident
- Wear suitable footwear when launching or recovering a boat, particularly if it is necessary to wade into the water, to prevent direct contact with the water and protect the feet from cuts and abrasions
- Clean down all equipment using a bucket and sponge after outings to remove any potential contamination.
- When taking a bottle of water onto the boat, ensure the bottle has a closed top, as opposed to a sports top bottle.

NEVER DRINK WATER FROM SOURCES SUCH AS RIVERS, LAKES, CANALS, OR THE SEA.

WASH HANDS THOROUGHLY BEFORE EATING OR DRINKING.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU BECOME ILL:

- See your doctor as soon as you think you may have relevant symptoms. Tell them that you have been in contact with/swallowed river water when rowing.
- Inform the club that you have contracted a disease associated with a waterborne cause so that others can be encouraged to take greater precautions.
- Report incidents to British Rowing at incidentreporting.britishrowing.org

WHY TAKE EXTRA CARE DURING/AFTER FLOODS OR PROLONGED RAIN?

During a flood the water will have passed over farmland so will have extra contaminants from manure and fertilisers. Water pollution is also more likely after heavy or prolonged rainfall, as runoff from manure spread on fields can enter rivers. Untreated sewage is often discharged into rivers as sewage treatment plants are overloaded. For real-time information on sewage spills, visit sewagemap.co.uk.

HOW VARIOUS CLUB ROLES SHOULD RESPOND TO POOR WATER QUALITY:

CLUB OFFICERS

Club Officers should assess waterborne contamination risks and integrate findings into club Risk Assessments. If risk is high, they should seek guidance from the Local Authority Environmental Health office and the local Water Authority. Clubs must also ensure that any information they have on poor river quality is provided to their members. Report incidents of sickness after rowing on poor quality water via British Rowing's Safety Incident Reporting system

COACHES

Coaches should understand and communicate the risk of poor river water to participants. They should monitor at-risk individuals and ensure adherence to safety measures.

COMPETITION OFFICERS AND ORGANISING COMMITTEES

Competition Officers should assess water contamination risks, incorporating them into competition Risk Assessments. Information on precautions to take should be communicated to relevant participants in the competition, such as umpires, officials, launch drivers, safety boat crews, and other personnel and competitors as appropriate. The guidance should include precautions to be taken to avoid exposure. Any early signs and symptoms of any relevant disease should be monitored so that early medical intervention can be sought.



More information can be found in [British Rowing's RowSafe, Section 8.4:](#)

