

## External Factsheet

# St Mary's Bay Designated Bathing Water

March 2024

## Subject

The designated bathing water at St Mary's Bay has a 'Poor' classification and therefore the Environment Agency has issued 'Advice against bathing' at this site.

## Background information

- We have a duty to monitor bathing waters, report bathing water quality, inform the public of pollution which could affect bathing waters and to investigate and identify actions to improve bathing water quality.
- On 1 December 2023, we published our annual bathing water classifications for every designated bathing water across the country. Amongst those given a 'Poor' classification was St Mary's Bay, meaning that it had failed to meet the minimum bathing water standard required.
- St Mary's Bay was classified as 'Poor' last year. This bathing water has therefore not improved its classification since last year.

## What happens when a designated bathing water receives a 'Poor' Classification?

- A 'Poor' Classification means bathing water quality does not meet the minimum standard. We are obliged to issue 'Advice against bathing' at 'Poor' bathing waters and the local authority is also obliged to provide signage advising against bathing at this location. We have a duty to warn and inform the public so they can make informed decisions about using the bathing water.
- Advice against bathing does not mean the beach is closed. Advice against bathing is advisory and public access to the beach and the sea remains open.
- The classification concerns the quality of the bathing water and is not classifying the cleanliness of the beach above the water.
- The local authority will install 'Advice against bathing' signage at the bathing water based on the classification. We indicate advice against bathing at the bathing water on our SWIMFO website.
- Advice against bathing signs will remain in place for the 2024 bathing season until the next set of classifications are released, even if individual samples during the season do not show pollution. This is because the overall classifications are based on four years' worth of samples.
- If results improve, then the overall classification could improve at the end of the season. However, if bacteria levels don't meet the strict minimum standards, we will continue to advise the public against bathing at this bathing water.
- An annual classification gives an overall assessment of water quality, but daily fluctuations in water quality can and do occur.
- Classifications give a long-term assessment of water quality over a four-year period. This has many uses including showing trends, allowing comparisons of water quality between bathing waters and also informing decisions on long-term pollution reduction measures.
- Bathing water samples will be taken over the summer months of 2024, both routine compliance samples and additional investigatory samples.

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**03708 506 506**

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**0800 80 70 60**

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## What is being done to investigate pollution and improve water quality?

- We began investigating a decline in bathing water quality at St Mary's Bay in 2021 and have since prioritised our resource for further work at this bathing water.
- We have taken additional investigatory samples at multiple locations in the area to narrow down sources of the contamination. This includes DNA testing to identify the source of bacteria found in the samples.
- We are working in partnership with Southern Water Services (SWS) to find and eliminate any possible sources of contamination from their network, including misconnections. SWS identified several misconnections since 2021, which they have now rectified.
- There are no water company permitted storm overflows or wastewater treatment works in the local area. This indicates that these types of assets have not caused deterioration in bathing water quality. This SWS webpage can be used to view storm discharges.
- Bathing water quality can also be affected by relatively small amounts of contamination. We are carrying out joint pollution prevention visits with SWS to properties and businesses in the area as part of our wider investigation into possible sources of the bacterial contamination. We are providing advice and guidance to promote appropriate drainage, prevent and rectify sources of pollution.
- We are also continuing working with partners to identify any further actions to improve water quality.
- We have carried out regulatory and pollution prevention visits to non-water company permit holders in the area to improve compliance of private drainage systems.
- Our Agricultural Officers have been out inspecting local farms and performing walkovers of the area actively looking for agricultural non-compliances. Our officers are working to rectify and prevent agricultural activities that may be cause pollution.

## Where can I find further information on bathing water quality?

There are various sources of information about bathing water quality which the public can access to find out how clean their bathing water is.

Our SWIMFO website, <https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/>, shows the latest water quality sample results for all the bathing waters in England. It also shows where we have issued advice against bathing, either because of a pollution incident that we are aware of which could affect bathing water quality or because our pollution risk forecasting system has forecast that bathing water quality is likely to be reduced based on rainfall and other factors. This is like a weather forecast for beaches. Unfortunately, this service is not currently available at all bathing waters. Our website does not currently show individual discharges made by water companies.

This link takes you to the St Mary's Bay information page:

[Bathing water profile \(data.gov.uk\)](#)

This link takes you to the sample results page for St Mary's Bay:

[Bathing waters data - sample history](#)

To find out more information about water quality assessments and classifications click on this link:

[Bathing Water Quality \(data.gov.uk\)](#)

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The Southern Water Beach Buoy website shows when discharges have been made to the sea in the vicinity of a bathing water. These discharges are often related to heavy rainfall. You can also check the history of a site and how many times it has discharged.

Note that there are no water company discharges in the vicinity of St Mary's Bay.

<https://www.southernwater.co.uk/water-for-life/our-bathing-waters/beachbuoy>

