

The following is intended to help members self-assess.

Risks of rowing when sea water is contaminated with bacteria

1. What is the risk?

SEPA measures bacterial contamination approx. once a week during the summer months, and the results take 24 -48 hours, so at other times the water quality is effectively unknown. There are electronic boards, which forecast good or poor water quality every day during the summer, at the bottom of Kings Road (which refers to the water to the West of the Figgie Burn ONLY- Portobello West) and the bottom of Bellfield Street (which refers on the water to the East of the Figgie Burn to Joppa-Portobello Central). However, this is only a prediction, not a certainty.

SEPA considers E.coli levels up to 500 (cfu/100ml) as safe for coastal water, but up to 1000 for inland waters, so as long as the levels are less than 1000 the risk is minimal to human health.

The most recent measurements can be accessed by searching SEPA then Locations and results

<https://bathingwaters.sepa.org.uk/locations-and-results>

In 2026, both Portobello Central and West got to levels between 500 and 1000 on one occasion, but Portobello Central also got to one level of 5400 which is VERY unusual, but it was not highlighted for several days.

Rowing is not likely to end in water submersion, but hands often get wet, and faces can be splashed. The risk of exposure is higher with kayaking and sailing.

2. What can I do to mitigate the risk?

The Club recommends that all rowers wash their hands as soon as possible after a row, and definitely before eating. Bring hand Gel

3. Am I particularly vulnerable if the water is significantly polluted?

Most people only experience diarrhoea with E.coli infection, but some bacterial strains are particularly virulent and if you have any condition that compromises your immune system, there is an increased risk of E.coli causing a serious illness, including kidney failure.

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