

Questions to the Environment Agency August 2022

From the River Lim Monitors:

The Environment Agency monitoring of our bathing beach (Front Beach in Lyme Regis) showed an e-coli spike when it was last monitored about a week ago. South West Water did not issue any alerts about sewage in advance of that.

Here's where I found the data:

https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fenvironment.data.gov.uk%2Fbwq%2Fprofiles%2Fdata-samples.html%3F_search%3DLyme%2520Regis%26bw%3Dukk2205-21500%23current&data=05%7C01%7CDCISEnquiries%40environment-agency.gov.uk%7Cb1d0a32f46814277543608da8738dae0%7C770a245002274c6290c74e38537f1102%7C0%7C0%7C637970975508286016%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikl1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=SO1uD6285GRBw1VGC2iytz7aGJQ9PFZ0myWiA1N3fwA%3D&reserved=0

The same level of spike occurred at the same time last year.

I've also contacted South West Water but we'd like to ask the EA:

What investigations are being carried out by the EA into that level of e-coli?

What might have caused it? Were there any alerts in advance that we may have missed or concerns raised about unregulated discharges that may have caused the problem and fall outside the notification system? What can be done to stop another repeat of this problem?

Front Beach is West of the River Lim so it's unlikely to have come down the river.

Reply from the Environment Agency: 29th September 2022

Thank you for your enquiry which was received on 25 August 2022. Please accept our apologies for the delay.

We respond to requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

The E coli result of 950 per 100ml recorded at Lyme Regis Front Beach on 17 August whilst unusual for the site is not exceptional. It was recorded after heavy rainfall in the catchment although this rainfall was not at a level that triggered us to issue a pollution risk warning (advice against bathing).

There were no alerts from South West Water's Beach Live system to indicate that there had been spills from CSOs in Lyme Regis, although there were alerts indicating spills at Seaton, Beer and Sidmouth to the West. The salinity recorded at the bathing water at the time the sample was taken was high indicating that the sample contained very little freshwater (less than 1%).

This suggests that the River Lim or the surface water outfall that discharges close to the bathing water were unlikely to be the source of contamination on this occasion. We cannot rule either of these potential sources out entirely however.

We do not generally undertake investigations in response to individual sample results unless they are exceptionally high. Rather, we undertake investigations where there has been a downgrade in bathing water classification status (based on the entire four-year data set) or where we calculate that there is a risk of a downgrade in status.

Lyme Regis Front Beach is a local priority for investigation because it falls into the latter category (i.e. it is at risk being downgraded from Good to Sufficient). As part of our ongoing investigations at Lyme Regis we have been monitoring levels of E coli and intestinal enterococci in the River Lim throughout this bathing water season. The results of this monitoring are published on our open data site ([Open WIMS data](#)). The results to date demonstrate that the Lim is contaminated by faecal bacteria during both wet and dry weather. We have identified a number of contaminated surface water discharges to the stream and are working with South West Water to resolve these issues as soon as possible.