

Scientists urge public to take part in second wave of health survey

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Anne Leonard and colleagues collecting samples on a Cornish beach

Scientists in Cornwall are making a second appeal for people to take part in research that will shed light on the health effects of marine pollution.

The researchers want to compare the [health](#) of people who venture into the waves with those who stay firmly on shore, to assess the impact on health from marine pollution. The University of Exeter Medical School is working with Surfers Against Sewage to conduct the study, with the second phase starting on 19 August.

The team are asking adults living in England and Wales to respond to a short online survey, answering questions about their health, visits to the beach, and whether or not they've been in the sea. They are eager to hear

from both water users and non-water users, including those who took part in the first stage of the study in June. Anyone aged over 18 in England or Wales can participate - either online or using a smartphone.

PhD student Anne Leonard, of the Medical School's European Centre for Environment and Human Health, is leading the project, and said: "We want to understand the risk of illness people face when they visit the beach and after a really successful first phase of the project, we now need as many people as possible to take part again – including those who have not been in the sea recently. A large number of people taking part in the study will allow us to be much more confident in our findings."

Over recent years concern about the cleanliness of coastal water - and its possible adverse effects on health - has led to tighter regulation and monitoring of seawater at popular beaches. As a result, the water quality of beaches across the UK has improved, with 99% of the 608 designated bathing beaches meeting mandatory European standards last year.

However, Surfers Against Sewage has warned the public about more than 3,000 short term pollution incidents on English beaches – episodes that current water quality tests are unlikely to capture.

The project's senior researcher, Dr William Gaze, said: "We know that water quality at a single beach can vary enormously throughout the day and at different points along its length. By comparing the health of those who've been in the sea with those who haven't, we're hoping to gain an insight into the risks of coastal bathing, and an understanding of whether this risk is reduced at beaches that are classified as safe by the current monitoring procedure."

Surfers Against Sewage's Campaign Director, Andy Cummins said: "The recent sewage spills at some of Cornwall's most popular beaches have highlighted the importance of [water quality](#) and monitoring. It's vital we

establish a more detailed understanding of how marine pollution is affecting the health of recreational water users, so that everyone can make the most of this fantastic natural resource."

The survey went live on 19 August and will be available for two weeks, and those who participated the first time around are encouraged to respond again.

More information: Further information and a link to the survey are available here: www.ecehh.org/news/public-report-health

Provided by University of Exeter

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