

## Participant Information Sheet

**Title of Project:** Evaluation of the Safer Seas and Rivers Service Smartphone App in protecting users from symptoms of infection/Safer Seas Survey

**Researcher names:** Dr Anne Leonard, Dr Matt Lloyd Jones, Emma Lamb, Prof William Gaze, Dr Tim Taylor

### Invitation and brief summary:

If you use Surfers Against Sewage's Safer Seas and Rivers Service Smartphone App, we would like to invite you to take part in a research project about the health of people who visit coastal beaches in the United Kingdom. Even if you have not been to the beach recently, your responses may still be useful for our research.

The aim of this project is to evaluate whether real-time water quality alerts change people's visits to coastal environments, and whether this affects the risk of feeling unwell with ailments such as stomach issues, skin conditions, ear or eye infections. We are also interested in measuring the impacts of any illness on people's lives – whether this is taking time off their normal daily activities, seeing a healthcare professional, or taking medication.

Climate change threatens coastal environments and water quality, and may alter the way people use these environments in the future to increase the risk of infection among water users. Communicating water quality issues to water users via Smartphone Apps, like the Safer Seas and Rivers Service, could be an important public health intervention to reduce waterborne infections.

Participating in this research project is entirely voluntary and involves answering an online survey. The survey will ask you about your use of the Safer Seas and Rivers Service Smartphone App, whether you have visited a UK beach in the past two weeks, the activities you did while at the beach, your diet, whether you have felt unwell recently. There will be questions about recent travel and your household, and about personal information, such as your age, sex, gender, ethnicity, and pre-existing medical conditions.

Please take time to review this information sheet thoroughly. It contains important information about the data we are collecting, why we are collecting it and how we will use it. If you have any further questions, please contact a member of the research team (details are at the end of this information sheet).

### Purpose of the research:

Coastal environments, particularly beaches, are sometimes at risk of pollution caused by sewage or agricultural run-off which contains microorganisms that can make some people unwell when they come into contact with them. Real-time alerts about water pollution allow beach visitors to make their own decisions about when and where they go to the beach, or whether to enter the water. The availability of such information

has the potential to protect some people from experiencing illnesses which are usually mild but occasionally affect their ability to carry out their normal daily activities.

The purpose of this research project is to understand the extent to which real-time water quality alerts change people's exposure to coastal beaches, and whether this affects the risk of experiencing illness.

### **Why have I been approached?**

We are interested in the extent of your contact with the sea in the UK and your health as someone who uses the Safer Seas and Rivers Service Smartphone App. To be eligible to participate, you must meet all the following criteria:

- You must use the Safer Seas and Rivers Service App;
- You must have used or intended to use coastal waters in the UK for recreational reasons in the past two weeks;
- You must be at least 16 years old;
- You must reside within the UK;
- You must not have used natural freshwaters (e.g. rivers, lakes, canals, ponds, quarries etc.) for recreation in the previous two weeks. This includes any activities that involve contact with the water, such as swimming, canoeing, kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding and wading.

### **What would taking part involve?**

If you choose to participate in this research project, you will be invited to complete an online survey about your use of the Safer Seas and Rivers Service Smartphone App, your recent visits to the beach and your health. This survey will be available until the **end of October 2025**.

### **How long will the survey take?**

The survey should take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete.

### **What information are we collecting and how will we use it?**

The survey will include questions about your use of the Safer Seas and Rivers Service App, any visits you have made to the beach in the past two weeks, as well as the activities you engaged in during those visits. We will also ask about your general health, dietary habits, any recent instances of feeling unwell and the impact any illness has had on you. There are some questions about recent travel, and about your household. We will also collect some personal information, such as age, sex, gender, ethnic group, educational attainment, and income.

Data from the survey will be summarised, and the findings will be compiled into a final report and published in a peer-reviewed journal. Once published, participants will have the option to request this report from the research team by contacting any of the named researchers below. Study findings may also be presented at academic

conferences. Results will be presented in such a way that no one will be able to tell that you took part in the study.

The data you provide will be made available on an online data repository called Zenodo under restricted access. This means that only genuine researchers may use this data in the future.

### **Can you change your mind and withdraw from this project?**

Withdraw during the project: if you wish to withdraw from the project, you can do so before submitting any responses to the survey. This can be done by simply closing the survey webpage before finishing the survey, and your data will not be saved or submitted. **Please note, that you will not be able to return to a half-completed survey if you close the page in which the survey is open.**

Withdraw after submitting your responses: it will not be possible to withdraw your data after you have completed the survey and submitted your responses. This is because the data we are collecting is anonymous and we will not be able to accurately identify your individual responses.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The findings from this research project will serve to inform effective strategies to protect visitors to coastal environments from ill health associated with poor water quality.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no identified disadvantages or risks of taking part.

### **How will my information be kept confidential?**

The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing [informationgovernance@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:informationgovernance@exeter.ac.uk) or at <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/ig/>.

We will keep all information about you safe and secure and we will strictly adhere to all Data Protection requirements to ensure full confidentiality of your information.

Anonymous data will be securely stored by the University of Exeter until December 2032.

BlueAdapt has an Open Research policy. Sharing data underlying the results in scientific publications brings many benefits: it allows other researchers to reuse the data, which saves time and resources. It also means others can double-check the results, and builds trust in the research. Overall, these benefits lead to a more reliable evidence base and a healthier world.



Data collected in this survey will be stored in a secure data repository, Zenodo, and only authorized researchers may access it by requesting permission.

### **Will I receive any payment for taking part?**

There is no payment for participating in this study.

### **What will happen to the results of this study?**

The findings of this study will be compiled into a final report and published in a peer-reviewed journal. We will write our reports in a way that no one can work out that you took part in the study. In addition, we will further aim to disseminate these findings through conferences, meetings with community groups, and the media.

### **Who is organising and funding this study?**

This project is being organised by the University of Exeter as part of a Horizon Europe and United Kingdom Research Innovation-funded project, called BlueAdapt. BlueAdapt is seeking to protect human health by understanding how climate change will affect disease-causing microorganisms and antimicrobial drug resistant bacteria in coastal waters. More information about BlueAdapt can be found on our website ([www.blueadapt.eu](http://www.blueadapt.eu)). Surfers Against Sewage are not involved in the design, data collection, data analysis or interpretation of this study.

### **Who has reviewed this study?**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Exeter Medical School and Health Care Practitioner Research Ethics Committee (Reference Number 1003545).

### **Contact for any questions or requests regarding your participation in this research**

In the event of queries or requests you may contact the research team using the following contact information.

Emma Lamb: [E.Lamb@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:E.Lamb@exeter.ac.uk)

Matt Lloyd Jones: [M.L.Jones@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:M.L.Jones@exeter.ac.uk)

Will Gaze: [W.H.Gaze@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:W.H.Gaze@exeter.ac.uk)

Tim Taylor: [Timothy.J.Taylor@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:Timothy.J.Taylor@exeter.ac.uk)

To contact the Research Ethics Committee, please email: [uemsethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:uemsethics@exeter.ac.uk)

You can also contact the University Research Ethics and Governance Team if you wish to make a complaint or comment: [cgr-reg@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:cgr-reg@exeter.ac.uk), or

Dr Antony Walsh



University  
of Exeter



Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Compliance  
University Corporate Services, University of Exeter  
G14, Lafrowda House, St Germans Road, Exeter, EX4 6TJ  
DD: 01392 726621 email A.Walsh3@exeter.ac.uk

Thank you for your interest in this project!

Proceed to the survey\*

[https://exe.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_50iyLcOpfkMt79Q](https://exe.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_50iyLcOpfkMt79Q)

\*Note to ethics committee: the information sheet, consent form and survey are all online. The information sheet will be hosted on the BlueAdapt Website. Once participants have read the information sheet, they will have the option to click on the link to proceed to the survey. The procedure to obtain consent involves going to the survey, and consent precedes the survey questions.