

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION GUIDELINES FOR WEIL'S DISEASE

Weil's Disease is a RARE but very serious illness. It is caused by bacteria carried in the urine of rats (and some other animals), which get into the waterways. The illness is very rare, but can be contracted anywhere. The descending scale of risk is: Stagnant water, canals and slow moving rivers (particularly after flash floods), swifter streams. Should you become ill after canoeing (2-19 days) with a flu-like illness (temperature, aching limbs and joints) call your doctor and tell him/her you are a canoeist. Contact the British Canoeing office for more information.

### What is it?

Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis) All water users should be aware of this potentially fatal infection. This is a bacterial infection normally believed to be spread by rat urine, it can also be transmitted by cat, fox and rabbit urine. Transmission is usually through an open wound or abrasion but can also be caused by ingestion of contaminated water. Symptoms are lethargy, diarrhoea, headaches, vomiting and muscle pain; sometimes referred to as flu-like symptoms. If left untreated this can be fatal.

### Precautions:

- Avoid capsizing or rolling in stagnant or slow moving water.
- Wash or shower after canoeing.
- Cover minor scratches on exposed parts of the body with waterproof plasters.
- Use footwear to avoid cutting feet.

### How do you catch it?

The infection is caused when leptospires, minute bacteria, enter the human host through a skin abrasion or through the lining of the mouth, throat and eyes after contact with an infected animal's urine or contaminated fresh water. There are many different types, or serovars, of this organism. Each tends to be associated with a different animal species. The most commonly found serovar in this country is *Leptospira hardjo*, which is associated with cattle. *Leptospira icterohaemorrhagiae* also occurs here and is associated with rats.

### How serious is it?

It can be a serious illness requiring hospital treatment and can lead to kidney or liver failure. Weil's Disease is a notifiable illness.

### Do I need to do anything?

Simple precautions can reduce even further the small risk, precautions to be listed as appropriate for the groups being addressed by the card. These could include a selection of the following:

- Cover all cuts and broken skin with waterproof plasters.
- Wash your hands or shower after canoeing.
- Avoid capsizing or rolling in stagnant or slow moving water.
- Use footwear to avoid cutting feet.
- If you have flu-like illness after canoeing go to your GP early – tell him/her you are a canoeist.
- Inform the Club Centre Senior Management Team

### What should I do about it?

If you are taken ill after canoeing, particularly from 2 to 19 days following, tell your doctor about your work or regular water sports activities and show him/her this information. You must call the doctor early. The most common early symptoms are: temperature, an influenza-like illness and joint and muscle pains. (Pains in the calf muscles are often particularly noticeable). Jaundice and/or conjunctivitis may be present, or develop, although the absence of any of these symptoms does not mean that the illness is not Weil's Disease – nor does a symptom in isolation necessarily indicate that Weil's Disease is present.

To the doctor: A canoeist's work/leisure pursuits may expose him/her to the danger of leptospirosis. Early treatment can be helpful in limiting the course of this infection. Serological testing is available for leptospirosis. However, it is only appropriate for confirming an initial clinical diagnosis and not for the purposes of whether or not to commence treatment. Your local Public Health Laboratory or hospital consultant microbiologist should be able to offer advice on the appropriateness of testing and preferred antibiotics.



ADVICE PROVIDED BY:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Leptospirosis/>

E-mail: [safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk](mailto:safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk)

[info@phoenixcanoecub.co.uk](mailto:info@phoenixcanoecub.co.uk)

**NOW WASH YOUR HANDS  
SHOWER AT HOME AFTER CANOEING**

