

Weils Disease/Leptospirosis

Being in contact with dirty water puts boaters (and other canal users) at risk from water borne diseases such as Leptospirosis (Weils Disease).

Human infection occurs through exposure to water or an environment contaminated by infected animal urine.

Rats and cattle are the most common carriers of the disease.

How do humans become infected?

Leptospirosis can enter the body through cut or damaged skin, but may also pass across damaged or intact mucous membranes, and the eyes.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms begin between 3 and 21 days after exposure, with an influenza-like illness with severe headache, high fever, tiredness, chills, muscle aches and vomiting. Later symptoms may include jaundice, eye redness, abdominal pain and diarrhoea. Severe cases can cause failure of kidneys or liver. The disease can be fatal – do not ignore symptoms.

If you feel ill, after having been actively involved in boating on the inland waterways, see your Doctor, and tell him/her why you are concerned about the possibility of Weil's. Ask if you can have an 'Elisa' blood test, which is conclusive.

Precautions

- Prior to any contact with river or canal water, or with structures or banks beside rivers or canals, cover all cuts and abrasions with waterproof dressings.
- Avoid full immersion in the water.
- After being in contact with river or canal water, or with structures or banks beside rivers or canals, wash all exposed skin thoroughly with antibacterial soap and clean water. If your clothes or footwear are wet or dirty, wash your hands thoroughly after handling them. It is vital that you do this before eating or drinking.
- Infection may enter through breaks in the skin, so take particular care to wash any cut, scratch or abrasion immediately. Thoroughly wash the wound in clean water and apply a sterile dressing, with antiseptic if available.
- Avoid rubbing your nose, eyes or mouth with your hands as infection may also enter the body orally.
- Do not put wet ropes, fishing lines or other objects in your mouth.

