

Safety Data

Weil's Disease

Weil's Disease is a bacterial infection carried in rats' urine, which contaminates water and wet riverbanks. The bacteria do not survive for long in dry conditions. It can be a serious illness requiring hospital treatment, and can lead to kidney or liver failure. ***Weil's Disease is a notifiable illness.***

The bacteria are absorbed through the skin or mucous membranes of the mouth and eyes. It gets into the blood stream very easily if you have a minor cut on your skin or feet, if you become immersed. If you feel ill after training - particularly in stagnant water or pools - or have any of the following symptoms, call your doctor promptly. The most common early symptoms are high temperature, an influenza-type illness and muscle pains.

Tell your doctor that you have been undertaking water activities and where and ask if you can have a blood test for Weil's disease. ~

Prevention measures are largely common sense

Cover all cuts and abrasions with waterproof plasters
Always wear footwear to avoid cutting the feet
Avoid capsizing drill or rolling practice in suspect water.
Where possible shower soon after the activity
If in doubt contact your doctor as soon as possible.

Blue-green Algae

Certain species of the blue-green algae can produce toxins which, upon contact, may cause a number of conditions such as dermatitis, asthma, eye irritation, rashes, blistering of the skin around the mouth and nose, nausea, gastroenteritis, muscle cramps, headaches and pneumonia in some people. They have also caused fatalities in fish, livestock and pets these organisms can undergo a very rapid population increase in favourable conditions (i.e. prolonged, warm, still weather and high levels of nutrients in the water such as nitrogen runoff from fertilisers used on adjacent land) and therefore, produce very high levels of toxin quite suddenly. This is sometimes, but not always, associated with the production of a scum at the surface of the water.

Situations where recreational water users are at most risk from toxins are:

Ingestion of scum on water including drinking raw water or inadequately treated water.
Skin contact with scum or water or raw water.

Many areas of water, particularly those used by sailing clubs, will now display information about blue green algae and where high levels of blue green algae are found, a flag will be flown to warn the public. The flag will be half blue and green with the word **toxic** across it. For other water areas contact your local river authorities or water company to find out whether blue-green algae is present.

Other potential hazards

Cryptosporidium

This is a parasite infection, which is widespread in the United Kingdom. Enhanced personal hygiene should be encouraged at all times. The symptoms are an acute diarrhoea illness, commonly of two to three week's duration from which the patient recovers fully unless there are underlying conditions.

Hepatitis A (Infectious Hepatitis)

Hepatitis A is a virus infection of the liver, which can vary from a mild or unapparent illness to, rarely, a severe disabling disease lasting several months. Infection has been caused by swallowing water during water sports. The incubation period varies from two to six months after swallowing the virus. The onset of the illness is abrupt, with loss of appetite, fever, nausea, and abdominal discomfort, following within a few days by jaundice. If you become ill at any time with these symptoms, call your doctor and tell him you participate in water sports.

Gastro-intestinal disturbance

The commonest illness associated with water sports is mild gastro intestinal disturbance (tummy upset), which can occasionally lead to diarrhoea and vomiting. When this happens you are advised to consult a doctor. Flu like symptoms and mild respiratory symptoms may also occur, as may eye and ear symptoms. Those generally resolve rapidly without treatment.

Taken from the Water Safety guide issued by the Scout association.