

GENERAL HEALTH HAZARDS FOR GROUP PARTICIPANTS

This appendix provides information on general health hazards when canoeing/kayaking or many other water based activity

A. GENERAL HEALTH HAZARDS

1. TETANUS

The organism causing tetanus is widespread and can enter your body through cuts, abrasions or puncture wounds made by splinters and thorns. It is potentially fatal and immunisation **before** infection is the only certain way of dealing with the disease. Check with your doctor how often you need a booster.

2. WEIL'S DISEASE (LEPTOSPIROSIS)

Water in ditches, slow moving rivers and ponds may contain rat urine capable of causing this life-threatening disease. Formerly, the disease occurred mainly amongst sewage or abattoir workers, farm workers and miners but recent records show that the majority of incidents and deaths are now related to water activities.

Infection arises through cuts, abrasions and through the eyes and the lining of the nose and mouth. It is advisable to:

- .. Always wash your hands before eating or drinking.
- .. Cover cuts and broken skin with waterproof plasters.
- .. Always wear footwear to avoid cutting the feet.
- .. Avoid capsize drill or rolling practice in suspect waters.
- .. Where possible, shower immediately after canoeing.
- .. Never touch dead rodents with bare hands.
- .. If in doubt, contact your doctor early.

The usual incubation period is 2 to 12 days. Leptospirosis (Weil's Disease) starts as a feverish illness with a high temperature and headache. At this stage, it can easily be controlled with antibiotics therefore contact your GP straight away. Many doctors in urban areas will never have encountered this disease. If you have any reason to suspect that you may have been infected, you may need to draw your doctor's attention to the possibility that the symptoms could be Weil's Disease. The diagnosis is by clinical suspicion as blood tests can rarely confirm the illness in time to affect treatment (but may subsequently confirm it).

3. LYME DISEASE

This disease occurs when bitten by an infected tick. The earliest sign may be a faint ring-shaped rash. Often you may not notice this and only become aware of the illness when you start to experience intermittent flu-like symptoms. At this stage, the infection responds well to antibiotics but if left untreated may result in serious illness.

The best defence is to keep your skin covered – especially your legs – when walking in forest or moor land areas. Check your skin and clothing frequently. Carefully remove any ticks and place a small dressing over the bite. The sooner the ticks are removed the less likely you will be infected. If you are worried about possible infection, contact your doctor.

4. GIARDIASIS

Giardiasis is an infectious illness which can be food or water-borne. It is recognised initially by the symptoms. These can include watery diarrhoea, abdominal pain, wind, vomiting, fever, weight loss and constipation. These symptoms can last for up to several weeks. It is caused by microscopic parasites entering the body through the mouth usually from unwashed hands and infected food or drink by:

- .. Eating food prepared by someone already suffering from Giardiasis,
- .. Contact with streams, ponds and similar untreated watercourses or
- .. Drinking un-chlorinated water.

Antibiotics are sometimes used in the treatment of this infection and your doctor will be able to decide if you would benefit from such treatment.

5. BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

The toxins produced by blue-green algae may cause a rash, or attack the nervous system, or upset the liver.

The most dangerous areas of infested waters are those where there is a concentration of wind-blown scum. Animals have died through drinking from these areas, but no human is known to have done so. Large quantities of infected water would need to be ingested. However, swimming and deliberate capsizes should be avoided when a known risk of blue-green algae bloom is present. As the toxicity can change by the day, or even during the day, and a test of the water takes two days to diagnose, it is very difficult to give precise guidance on the likely risk at any particular time.

6. Surfers Ear

Surfer's ear is the common name for an exostosis or abnormal bone growth within the ear canal.

Irritation from cold wind and water exposure causes the bone surrounding the ear canal to develop lumps of new bony growth which constrict the ear canal which could cause the following symptoms decreased hearing, difficulty evacuating debris or water and/or increased prevalence of ear infections. The condition is so named due to its prevalence among cold water surfers. Most avid surfers have at least some mild bone growths, causing little to no problems. The condition is progressive, making it important to take preventative measures early, preferably whenever

surfing. The condition is not limited to surfing and can occur in any activity with cold, wet, windy conditions such as kayaking, sailing, jet skiing, and diving.

Try to avoid activity during extremely cold or windy conditions and keep the ear canal as warm and dry as possible (using ear plugs, a skull cap or a neoprene hood)

B. OTHER SAFETY CONCERNS IN THE OUTDOORS

HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS

Many animal poisons, rodenticides, herbicides, insecticides and timber treatment products may be in legitimate use in the countryside and should pose no threat to the public. However, occasionally as a result of criminal activity, such pesticides or poisons may be found discarded in an inappropriate manner. If you come across any suspect containers whilst on a canoe trip, it is imperative that they are not touched. Mark their position and contact the Police.