Safety Notice - Leptospirosis and Weil’s Disease

*Raising funds for the Cotswold Canals Trust and The Door Youth Project*

Leptospirosis or Weil’s disease is a type of bacterial infection spread by animals (NHS Choices, 2016). Although the condition is uncommon in the UK, people who regularly deal with animals have a higher risk of developing the disease. Leptospirosis can also be contracted from water contaminated by the urine of infected animals, such as cattle, pigs, dogs and rats. Therefore, people in contact with water on lakes, rivers and canals may be at higher risk.

In 90% of cases, leptospirosis only causes mild flu-like symptoms, such as a headache, chills and muscle pain (NHS Choices, 2016). However, in some cases the infection can be more severe and cause life-threatening problems. In its most severe form, leptospirosis is also known as Weil’s Disease.

**Precautions:**

NHS Choices (2016) advises the rates of leptospirosis in the UK are very low so there’s no reason why you should not participate in freshwater activities. However, as a minimum precaution, it is recommended that you cover any cuts and grazes with a waterproof dressing and shower after the event.

The British Rowing Rowsafe Guide ([https://www.britishrowing.org/upload/files/RowSafe/5-3-WaterborneDiseases-v1.pdf?78251f](https://www.britishrowing.org/upload/files/RowSafe/5-3-WaterborneDiseases-v1.pdf?78251f)) also recommends the following precautionary measures:

- Never drink the water
- Wash hands thoroughly before eating and drinking
- Wear suitable footwear to avoid cutting your feet
- Avoid contact with water and minimise splashing (particularly around the head)
- Hose down all equipment after outing and wash and dry any wet clothing.
**Symptoms:**

The NHS Choices website provides information on the symptoms of leptospirosis ([http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Leptospirosis/Pages/Symptoms.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Leptospirosis/Pages/Symptoms.aspx)). If you have any flu-like symptoms within 30 days of the raft race, you must contact your doctor and advise that you have been exposed to canal freshwater. Leptospirosis is much less severe if treated promptly. Symptoms may include:

- High temperature
- Chills
- Sudden headaches
- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Muscle pain (particularly in the calves and lower back)
- Irritation and redness of the eyes
- Cough
- A short-lived rash.

**Treatment:**

Leptospirosis is confirmed by running a series of blood and urine tests to check for specific antibodies. The doctor will provide advice on the best course of treatment, which usually comprises a course of antibiotics for mild forms of the disease.

**References and Further Information:**


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