



BRITISH CANOEING

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## **WATER-BORNE INFECTIOUS DISEASES**

## **British Canoeing Water-Borne Infectious Diseases**

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# BEWARE OF BUGS, BLOOMS AND BIO-HAZARDS

## RESPONSIBILITIES

### PERSONAL

Follow the advice and training given by your club and coaches on the prevention of contact with potentially harmful diseases.

Adopt these measures as part of your routine before, during and after paddling.

Be aware of the symptoms of water-borne diseases and to know what action to take.

### CLUB

Provide information on diseases most likely to be encountered by club members, either on their home water or when they visit other venues.

Display posters in appropriate places (Safety Notice Board, changing rooms, toilets etc.) informing members of the dangers, avoidance, symptoms and treatment of water-borne diseases.

### COACH

Make yourself aware of the diseases likely to be encountered on your home water or at other venues that club members / paddlers may visit.

Include knowledge about the prevention and the symptoms of water-borne diseases as part of your training programmes.

Be aware of the potential dangers of contact with water-borne diseases, the immediate treatment of someone suspected of coming into contact with a possible contaminant, and the need to seek medical attention.

Be aware of measures to reduce the possibility of contact with potentially harmful diseases and train your crews in the routine use of such measures.

### CLUB WATER SAFETY ADVISER

Make yourself aware of the diseases likely to be encountered on your home water or at other venues that club members may visit.

Be able to recognise the causes of water-borne diseases (eg algal blooms) and their symptoms.

Be aware of the treatment for someone who may contract such diseases.

Have knowledge of the preventative measures that should be used to avoid contamination and so reduce the likelihood of infection.

Advise the club in all of the above.

## MINIMUM STANDARDS TO BE ADOPTED

Information about water-borne diseases, prevention and symptoms should be provided to all members. Club members should be advised:

- ▶ Never drink water from a river or lake.
- ▶ If contaminated water has been swallowed, refer to your doctor with full details of the incident.
- ▶ Only drink from your own water bottle.
- ▶ Always shower after contact with the water.
- ▶ Wash hands thoroughly and shower if necessary before eating or drinking.
- ▶ Cover cuts and abrasions (including blisters) with waterproof dressings.
- ▶ Wear suitable footwear, particularly when launching or landing, and particularly if it is necessary to wade into the water, to prevent direct contact with the water and protect the feet from cuts and abrasions.
- ▶ Avoid immersion in, or contact with, water, particularly if there is an algal scum or bloom.
- ▶ Do not splash river or lake water onto your face or body in order to cool down (take a bottle of tap water with you for this).
- ▶ Hose down all equipment after outings to remove any potential contamination.
- ▶ Wash, and thoroughly dry, any contaminated clothing before re-use.
- ▶ Maintain your immunisation regime against Tetanus, also Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Polio, Typhoid and Dysentery when training abroad.

## **FURTHER GOOD PRACTICE**

In addition to minimum standards to be adopted.

### **PERSONAL**

- Avoid jumping into, or swimming in, rivers and lakes.
- Don't submerge hands or legs over the side of the boat in order to cool down (take a bottle of tap water with you for this).
- Do minimise contact with water by wearing close fitting clothing.

### **CLUB**

- Supply alcohol wash bottles in the boathouse.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The water we paddle upon is not always as clean as we would choose and certainly is not pure enough to be swallowed without giving more than a passing thought to the possible effects it will have upon our internal systems. The British Canoeing Safety Guidelines have, as their primary aim, the prevention of accidents involving physical injury, damage to equipment and, at worst, drowning. However, there are other risks to health associated with water-based activities which arise from the microbiological, or chemical, quality of the water itself and of its immediate environs. The use of inland waters can never be risk free and it is essential that, as users, we are aware of the risks present.

## **WATER-BORNE DISEASES MOST LIKELY TO BE ENCOUNTERED**

### **WEIL'S DISEASE - LEPTOSPIROSIS**

The risk of contracting Leptospirosis from recreational water is very small, however the serious nature of the disease is such that we must be aware of the dangers and should take simple precautions to reduce the risk of infection. Leptospirosis is an infection caught through contact with infected animal urine (mainly from rodents, cattle or pigs). The causal organism can enter the body via cuts or abrasions of the skin or, the lining of the nose, mouth, throat or eyes. If flu-like symptoms develop shortly after contact with the water (1-3 weeks) then your doctor should be contacted and advised of the circumstances of exposure.

### **BLUE-GREEN ALGAE - CYANOBACTERIA**

Cyanobacteria are commonly found in fresh and brackish water during mid to late summer. Algal blooms can form during extended periods of warm, settled weather. The blooms may be flocculent or have a jelly or paint-like appearance and are normally blue-green in colour though red, brown or black forms can occur. Algal scums accumulate downwind on the surface of lakes and slow moving water. The majority of blooms produce allergens and/or toxins and have caused the death of animals, including sheep and dogs. In humans they can cause eye irritation, dermatitis and joint/muscle pain or, more seriously, gastro-enteritis, pneumonia, liver damage and certain neurological conditions.

### **GASTRO-INTESTINAL ILLNESS**

The use of inland water will never be risk free and it is essential that users are aware of the risks involved in using a particular stretch of water. Assessing the risks posed by water quality is difficult as conditions can vary substantially in a very short space of time. In general, the health risk will depend on the number and proximity of sewage effluent discharges in any particular body of water. There are currently no microbiological standards for recreational water and, at present, only the powers provided under the Public Health Act 1936 - Section 259, to deal with 'any pond, ditch, gutter or water course which is so foul or in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance', provide us with protection. Many organisms causing gastro-intestinal illnesses (eg Salmonella) can be found in water contaminated with sewage and extra precautions should be taken when rowing on flood-water and water known, or suspected, to contain sewage.

### **HEPATITIS A**

Hepatitis is caused by a virus present in faeces and is, therefore another condition that may be contracted from water contaminated with sewage. The onset of Hepatitis can be abrupt and symptoms include fever, jaundice and abdominal discomfort.

### **OTHER**

Other potential infections include Polio, Tetanus and Typhoid, though they are less likely to be found in British waters.

- HSE Guidance on Leptospirosis