

APPENDIX 9

INFORMATION RE LEPTOSPIROSIS

Weils Disease/ Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is a disease caused by bacteria which infect a variety of wild and domestic animals. The animals can then spread the bacteria to humans in their urine.

How can paddlers become infected?

Paddlers and other river users can become infected through exposure to water contaminated by infected urine. Infection 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?

Leptospirosis can cause a wide range of symptoms, although some infected people appear healthy. Leptospirosis is an acute biphasic illness. In the first phase the Leptospire spread through the blood to many tissues, including the brain. Some cases may be asymptomatic in this phase or may present with onset of a **flu-like illness, a severe headache, chills, muscle aches and vomiting**. In some cases, an immune phase may return with a return of **fever, jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), red eyes, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, or a rash. In more severe cases there may be failure of some organs, e.g. the kidneys, or meningitis**. Generally, cases will recover within two to six weeks but some may take up to three months.

Diagnosis.

As many of these symptoms are the same as for other diseases, diagnosis of Leptospirosis is based on clinical suspicion confirmed by laboratory testing of a blood sample

How soon after the exposure do symptoms occur?

Typically, symptoms develop seven to fourteen days after infection, though rarely the incubation period can be as short as two to three days or as long as thirty days.

How is Leptospirosis treated?

Leptospirosis is treated with antibiotics which should be given early in the course of the disease.

Ways to avoid contracting Weil's disease are very simple:

- Avoid capsizing drill in stagnant or slow moving water, particularly where rat infestation is obvious.
- **Wash or shower after canoeing.**
- **Cover minor cuts and scratches with waterproof plasters before getting in your boat.**
- Wear trainers or wetsuit boots to avoid cutting your feet.
- **If you have flu-like symptoms after canoeing go to your GP and tell him you are a canoeist.**