

## Diseases of freshwater



**This document is not meant to alarm but to provide a balanced approach to the risks of Lyme and other diseases that you can pick up at any UK freshwater fishery (including ours).**

This is not a comprehensive document but intended as a quick reference guide. If in any doubt always seek professional medical attention.

### Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is a tick-borne infection (transmitted by the bite of a tick).

As the summer approaches there is a tendency to wear fewer clothes and less robust footwear, this, coupled with greater tick activity in warmer weather, increases the chance of getting bitten.

#### Prevention

Using the “prevention is better than cure” policy the best approach is to avoid getting bitten in the first place. Ticks wait in grass and low vegetation in order to latch onto their host as they walk through:

- Keep skin covered when in places where ticks may lie. It may not be the most comfortable but boots and long trousers are a good idea at all times
- Use insect repellent on skin and clothing (DEET based versions are best)
- Avoid walking through long grass or vegetation
- Wear light-coloured clothing so that ticks are more easily seen and brushed off

#### Medical Assistance

Seek advice from your GP if you have been bitten by a tick and you have:

- a red “bulls-eye” rash
- or have flu-like symptoms

Bear in mind that the tick may have finished feeding and dropped off by the time you notice the bite.



*Classic “bulls-eye” rash following a tick bite*

#### Tick Removal

It is a perfectly normal reaction to try to tear the tick out as soon as you see it. This is not recommended as you may leave parts embedded in your skin, go to your GP surgery or the local minor injuries unit, the nearest is Abingdon and there is also one at Newbury.

## Other Diseases

In addition to Lyme disease there are several water borne diseases. Fortunately, simple precautions will stop most of them ever getting to cause you any problems, these include, but are not limited to:

- Clean your hands before handling food (use anti-bacterial wipes and/or gel)
- Avoid splashing pond or river water into your mouth or eyes
- Keep any open wounds well covered and protected from contact with the water
- Ensure your anti-tetanus and other inoculations are up to date

### Weil's Disease – Leptospirosis

The disease is called leptospirosis and is only described as “Weil’s disease” in the most serious of cases, the risk of developing this is very small, there are roughly 40 cases of Weil’s disease across the UK each year (most of which were from people working in pest control or other close contact with rats). It is carried in animal urine (especially rats, sheep and pigs).

Symptoms start as flu-like occurring about 1-3 weeks after infection. In full-blown Weil’s disease there may be yellowing of skin and eyes, chest pain and coughing blood.

Most leptospirosis infections are managed by the body’s own defences, but regardless of this you should see your GP if you are concerned.

### Gastro-intestinal illness

A whole host of water-borne diseases caused by a plethora of bacteria, amoeba and other simple intestinal parasites, there are too many to list individually.

Symptoms are stomach cramps, vomiting and diarrhoea.

### Hepatitis

This is a viral infection that may be encountered in water contaminated by sewage.

Symptoms are jaundice (yellowing of skin), fever and abdominal discomfort.

### Blue-Green Algae – Cyanobacteria

This differs from the others in that this is not a disease or infection but causes poisoning.

The algae can build toxins in the cell which are released into the water on death of the algae.

The symptoms can be serious including (but not limited to) vomiting and diarrhoea, organ and nerve damage, joint/muscle pain, skin rash and eye irritation.

Keep pets and other animals away from water with an algal bloom because drinking poisoned water can kill.

### Others

There are many once common diseases that, because of their devastating impact, are now almost totally eliminated from this country. You would have to be very unfortunate indeed to catch anything such as polio or typhoid.

This is not a medically complete document and is intended as a quick guide only. If you are in any doubt please seek medical assistance and advise the practitioner that you have been in contact with untreated water, with the dates of the exposure. If you think the water was further contaminated (with sewage or blue-green algae, for example) that should also be noted.

If you are fishing abroad take medical advice on the inoculations you should have before you go.