

INFECTIONS AS WORK

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INFECTIONS AT WORK

Those working in the outdoor leisure sector have a slightly increased risk of contracting specific infections than the general population due to the nature of their work. Infection organisms can be transferred via several routes:

- Inhaled as spores or droplets
- Through the skin via cuts and abrasions
- Splashes to the eyes, nose and mouth of infected liquids
- Ingested through contaminated hands or foodstuff
- Bites from insects

The likely infections to be aware of: Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis) - Is mainly caused by coming into contact with water in ditches, ponds and slow moving rivers, or streams that are contaminated with rat urine, other sources are grain and seeds that rats may have fed on. Infection arises through the bacteria entering the body through cuts and abrasions in the skin or droplets and splashes to the eyes, mouth and linings of the nose.

Infection can be prevented by always washing your hands before eating, drinking or smoking. Cuts and abrasions should always be covered with waterproof dressings and, if you are immersed in potentially contaminated water, waterproof protective clothing should be worn. Gloves should be worn or tongs used to handle dead rodents.

LYME DISEASE - Is contracted by bites from infected ticks. The ticks feed and breed on animals but can be deposited on vegetation in woodland or heaths. People entering these areas may come into contact with the tick which can attach itself to skin. Early signs of a bite and infection can be a rash, which should be medically examined. The risk of infection can be reduced by:

- being aware of ticks, and which areas they normally live in,
- wearing appropriate clothing in tick infested areas
- using insect repellents, •inspecting your skin for ticks, especially at the end of the day - include your head, neck and skin folds (armpits, groin, and waistband),

If a tick is found on the skin, it should be removed by gently gripping it as close to the skin as possible, preferably using fine toothed tweezers, and pulled steadily away. It is essential that the head and mouth parts are removed otherwise it may only remove the tick body leaving the possibility of infection from the mouth. Some veterinary surgeries and pet shops sell inexpensive tick removal devices.

The initial symptoms of both Weil's and Lyme disease are flu like. Both are treatable in the early stages with antibiotics. Outdoor workers should alert their GP to the nature of their occupation to ensure that these diseases are taken into account.

TETANUS - Is caused by the tetanus bacterium getting into the body via a wound such as a cut or animal bite. The risk of the disease is greater where the wound is deep or gets dirty with organic matter. However, even small wounds such as thorn pricks can introduce enough bacteria to cause infection. Protection against tetanus is achieved by immunisation. Five doses of the vaccine are required to give life long immunity. Normally, every child in the UK is immunised in childhood. Booster injections are required every 10 years for those who haven't had the full five doses. Even where the vaccine has been given, medical advice should be sought where wounds are deep, badly soiled or extensive flesh damage has been sustained.

Outdoor workers should ensure that they have had the requisite number of vaccinations.

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