

THIS IS A HEALTH AND SAFETY NOTICE FOR YOUR INFORMATION

RATS **are Killers**

You are much more likely to be knocked down 'Crossing the Road' or to 'Drown' on an Inland Waterway than to catch Weil's Disease. However, if you do get the symptoms then informing your doctor that you might have this infection, may just help to save your life.

Weil's Disease or Leptospirosis

The National rat population is increasing and in Common with most Waterways the River Medway is infested with the rats. Between 50% and 60% of rats carry and excrete the organism *Leptospira icterohaemorrhagiae* in their urine. Infection of humans by this organism causes an illness, Leptospirosis (commonly called Weil's disease) which has been known to result in death in 10% of cases. The incidence of Weil's Disease amongst water sports users of waterways has been increasing. The majority of deaths are now related to water activities. In 1989 there were 19 deaths and 13 of these were associated with water users.

The organism enters the body through breaks in the skin such as cuts, blisters and abrasions, or via the lining of the nose, throat or alimentary tract. The incubation period is 7-13 days and the disease starts with a fever, muscular aches and pains, loss of appetite and vomiting with prostration. Subsequent bruising of the skin, sore eyes, nose bleeds and jaundice may occur. The fever lasts about five days and may be followed by significant deterioration. It is vital that the doctor be told that the patient may have been in contact with a source of infection. The symptoms can easily be mistaken for those of flu and, if the patient has a clean occupation, the possibility of Weil's disease may be overlooked in the early stages. Laboratory testing of blood will confirm the diagnosis but this may take undue time in an ordinary hospital lab. **Treatment is usually by Penicillin Antibiotic.**

Note:-

The disease is curable if recognised in time, but many doctors in urban areas will never have encountered it. If you have any reason to suspect that you may have been infected, you may need to draw your doctor's attention to the possibility that the symptoms could be Weil's Disease

Symptoms are:-

The incubation period is 7-13 days. Early Symptoms are: Flu like, Fever, Muscular aches and pains Loss of appetite Vomiting with prostration Later symptoms may include: Bruising of the skin Sore eyes Nosebleeds Jaundice. The fever lasts for about five days, and may be followed by significant deterioration.

Prevention:-

Water sports enthusiasts have been known to contract the disease. Some of these have suffered a mild dose which was not diagnosed at the time, but which has been detected in subsequent blood tests. Any skin wound cuts or blister, old or new, may be infected if by water polluted by the organism. Running water is less likely to cause infection than stagnant water and as the organism lives longer in warm weather you are more likely to catch it in summer than in winter.

Avoid places where Rats are likely to have been! Avoid putting your hand on to damp and wet surfaces on the riverbank, avoid rubbing your hands on your eyes and face whilst on the river. Don't put your water bottles on to damp grass areas where rats may have urinated. Protect all cuts and abrasions with waterproof surgical plasters and wash, your hands and any wounds in clean fresh water as soon as possible after each outing.