Leptospirosis / Weil's Disease

All paddlers and their parents/carers should be aware of the dangers of Weil's disease. It is a rare condition in the UK but steps should be taken to prevent the risk of infection.

What is Weil's disease?
It is a bacterial infection carried in the urine of infected rats and may contaminate water in lakes, rivers and canals. The bacteria get into your body through cuts and scratches or through the lining of the mouth, throat and eyes after contact with infected urine or contaminated water.

Symptoms
Incubation period is 2 -12 days. The disease starts with flu-like symptoms such as a headache or muscle pains. More severe cases can lead to meningitis, kidney failure and other serious conditions. In very rare cases the disease can be fatal.

Treatment
If you think that you might be infected, go to your doctor and tell them that you have been at risk of Weil's disease. Make sure that your illness is not dismissed as flu. Many cases recover without specific treatment, but infection will be limited by treatment with anti-biotics.

Prevention during paddlesport

- Cover all cuts and abrasions with waterproof plasters
- Do not rub eyes or fingers in your eyes or nose
- Wash hands as soon as you have finished paddling
- Have a shower as soon as you get home
- If in doubt contact your doctor

The greatest risk of contracting Weil's disease is from drinking straight from bottles that have been stored in pub cellars to which rats have access.