



## **Pond dipping in NMPS; Information for parents**

As you may be aware, pond dipping forms a key part of our Forest School curriculum. The school pond is well established with a huge variety of wildlife and plant life including frogs, newts and insects. The school has all the recommended risk assessment in place for this activity to take place and the however we are instructed by DCC that parents/carers should be given information about the potential hazard of Weils disease which can be associated with areas of stagnant water.

It is highly unlikely that any child will catch the disease from our pond as we will be ensuring that all children wash hands thoroughly after pond dipping and that all cuts and scratches are covered up. There are considerable benefits to the immune system of children through interacting with the beneficial bacteria in ponds and soil.

### **Weils disease; causes of infection**

Infection of humans usually occurs where open wounds are immersed in relatively stagnant water contaminated with rat or cattle urine. It can be contracted from contact with any fresh or untreated water including ponds, canals, lakes and rivers, as well as flood waters that are contaminated.

- Those most at risk of infection are open water swimmers who expose their whole body to possible infection.
- Activities that occur in or near fresh water such as fishing, water skiing, sailing and kayaking also present a risk.
- Activities that can cause open wounds or that take place near the water's edge where rat urine is more likely to be found increase the risk of contracting the disease.
- People who have previously had leptospirosis develop immunity to the particular strain that they were infected with and others closely related for up to ten years. They are not immune to other strains and may become infected again if continuing in activities where it is a risk.
- It does not usually result from swallowing water or rat bites.
- The bacteria are unable to survive in salt water, so there is no risk of infection of Weil's disease from swimming in the sea.

The risk of contracting the disease varies according to the size of the local rat population, which unfortunately is very hard to assess. Landowners, local authority

environmental health departments, and in agricultural areas, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), may be able to provide assistance for operators who may need to assess the risk.

### **Symptoms of Weils disease**

Symptoms can occur between 3 and 21 days from the time of infection. There can be two distinct phases of leptospirosis.

#### **The first phase:**

- Symptoms are similar to those of the flu, including high fever, severe headache, chills, muscle aches, and vomiting, and may also include a rash.
- May last between 3 to 5 days before recovery.
- In mild cases the patient will recover after just the first phase but they can suffer fatigue and depression for some time afterwards.

#### **The second phase:**

- Initial symptoms will reoccur.
- Further symptoms can vary according to severity and may include jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), red eyes, abdominal pain, and diarrhoea.
- Symptoms can be similar to those of meningitis.
- Severe cases can also cause the failure of kidneys or liver.
- Death can occur due to heart, liver or respiratory failure.

**This information will also be posted on our school website for your convenience.  
(Information taken from ROSPA website.)**