

Outdoor Health Information

Waterborne diseases: all year-round

E.Coli: all year-round

Wild Parsnip & Giant Hogweed: March - October

Ticks: March - November

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) Caterpillars: May - July

Harvest mites: August - October

The seasons/months stated in this document are guidelines and may vary due to local weather conditions.

We recommend that you share this information to parents or guardians of children taking part in fieldwork.

Waterborne diseases: All year-round

To reduce the risk of contracting waterborne disease at river sites:

- No hand-mouth contact (includes eating/drinking during fieldwork)
- Cleaning hands prior to meals and on return to the Centre
- Covering open cuts that are likely to come into contact with infected water with tape, waterproof dressings and protective gloves

If individuals wish to wear gloves for their own peace of mind they may do so.

The infection that carries the greatest risk is Weil's disease (Leptospirosis) however the chances of contracting this disease are very low. Symptoms include:

- A feeling of having a 'flu-like' illness
- Above normal temperature and/or a feeling of chill
- Pains in joints and muscles – calf and back muscle pains being particularly noticeable
- May sometimes be accompanied by a skin rash (similar to that of meningitis)

If course participants develop any of these symptoms within four weeks of their return from the field trip, they are advised to consult their family doctor, mentioning the possibility of Leptospirosis. Treatment by antibiotics in the early stages is highly effective.

E. Coli: All year-round

By being outside in the environment there is a risk of coming into contact with faecal matter on and in soil, plants, animals and other surfaces that have been in contact with them. E. Coli 0157 can cause diarrhoea, fever, aches and stomach cramps for up to 2 weeks from initial infection and for two weeks duration. If you are having these symptoms, please see your GP.

However, risk is massively reduced by simple handwashing with soap and warm water. Where this is not available hand sanitiser will be provided at field sites. Waterproof plasters or Nitrile gloves can be worn by course participants if hands have cuts on them.

For further information [Escherichia coli \(E. coli\): guidance, data and analysis - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/escherichia-coli-0157-guidance)



Wild Parsnip & Giant Hogweed: March – October



Wild Parsnip can be found in grassland and waste ground, predominately chalky / limestone areas.

You should avoid touching wild parsnip as the sap within the leaves can cause skin irritation similar to a chemical burn – reddening, blisters and burning which can remain visible for several weeks.

Giant Hogweed can grow up to 14ft tall and can have leaves up to 5ft wide. It has large white flowers, and its leaves have a spikey, claw-like look. It is found in similar conditions to Wild Parsnip. The sap is also similar to that of Wild Parsnip, but worse, in that it's burns can last for much longer and cause severe blisters and irritation.



Both Wild Parsnip and Giant Hogweed are very similar in look to other commonly found plants, so it is important to be aware of what is and isn't dangerous, and to ask if you are unsure.

Ticks: most common March – November

Ticks are small, spider like creatures that feed on the blood of animals, including people, and can transmit bacteria that cause diseases.

Ticks vary in size from about 1mm to 1cm long and are usually found in woodlands and grassland.



To help prevent tick bites

- Wear long sleeves and trousers, and tuck your trousers into your socks
- Use insect repellent on your clothes and skin – products containing DEET are best
- Wear light-coloured clothing so ticks are easier to see and brush off

Perform a tick check after returning from spending time outdoors by looking and feeling your body as you may not always notice being bitten. Ticks prefer warm, moist places on your body, especially the groin area, waist, arm pits, behind the knee and along hair lines, so look out for anything as tiny as a freckle or a speck of dirt.

Young children are more commonly bitten on the head/scalp so they would need to be carefully checked around the neck, behind the ears and along the hairline.

Government information (2022) [Be Tick Aware Toolkit](#)

If you have been bitten it is important to remove the tick correctly as soon as possible. The safest way to remove a tick is by using a tick removal tool. If you do not have a tick removal tool, using a pair of tweezers grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull upwards slowly and firmly to ensure all of the tick including mouthparts is removed.

Once removed, apply antiseptic to the bite area, or wash with soap and water and keep an eye on it for several weeks for any changes.

Lyme Disease

Tick bites can transmit Lyme disease which can lead to very serious conditions if left untreated, so it is important to go to your GP if you have **flu like symptoms or an expanding rash** around a bite after spending time in tick prevalent areas.

Flu-like symptoms can occur a few days or weeks after they were bitten by an infected tick, such as:

- a high temperature, or feeling hot and shivery
- headache
- muscle and joint pain
- tiredness and loss of energy

Lyme disease can be treated with a course of antibiotics, so prevention and early detection are crucial.



For further information <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lyme-disease/>

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) Caterpillars: May – July



Caterpillars of the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) are a pest which can be a hazard to the health of oak trees, people and animals. Their tiny hairs can be blown about by the wind and cause itchy skin rashes, eye and throat irritations and, occasionally, breathing difficulties in people and animals. Caterpillars of the Oak Processionary Moth live and feed almost exclusively on oak trees.

Avoid touching or approaching nests or caterpillars.

You can report an OPM sighting to the Forestry Commission by

Email: opm@forestrycommission.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 067 4442

Harvest mites: most common August – October



How do you know if you have been bitten by harvest mites?

Harvest mite bites are always in areas covered by clothes and never on exposed skin and often in moist hidden folds of the body or for where clothing forms a constriction. The bites cause extremely irritating heat lumps lasting from four to fourteen days which become even itchier after a warm bath or vigorous exercise. The mites are very selective preferring humans with soft delicate skin.

What can you do to remove the mites?

- a hot bath and scrubbing may be effective in removing mites
- calamine lotion is effective in reducing irritation
- antihistamine creams can be used, but they themselves can cause irritation on sensitive skins if used repeatedly
- an oral antihistamine such as Piriton can reduce the irritation (a dose before bed might help)
- bite and sting cream can help to reduce irritation