LEPTOSPIROSIS
(Weil's Disease)

What is it?
Leptospirosis is a very uncommon disease. There are on average about 80 cases a year in England and Wales. It is caused by the bacterium Leptospira which is carried in the urine of infected animals. The main types are Leptospira haemorrhagiae which is carried by rodents and causes Weil's disease, and Leptospira hardjo carried mainly by cattle. The majority of cases occur in farm workers, anglers, those involved in water sports and water/sewage workers.

How do I know if someone has it?
Symptoms include the flu-like symptoms; feeling generally unwell and achey, a fever, conjunctivitis and jaundice. Often the illness is mild but sometimes leptospirosis is a serious disease affecting the liver and kidneys. It is only possible to know that someone has it from a blood test.

Is it infectious?
Transmission is by skin contact, especially if damaged, or mucous membranes (eg mouth or eyes) with infected urine from animals or water contaminated by rats urine.

What is the incubation period?
Symptoms occur 3 to 19 days after contact with infected material.

Is there any treatment?
Antibiotic treatment is helpful if started early in the illness.

What should I do to avoid getting the illness?
The following are good tips for anyone who has contact with outdoor water:
- Wash your hands in clean hot water before eating.
- Cover cuts with waterproof plasters.
- Wash or shower after your water activity if you have been immersed.
- Don't encourage rats by leaving food around at home or in the countryside.
- Modern dairy practice means that it is impossible to avoid urine splashes during milking. Farmers and vets have received advice on protection, which includes using gloves, aprons and ideally goggles. Washing after contact with infected matter reduces the risk of contamination. Farmers are encouraged to vaccinate their cattle.

What should I do if I think I may have the illness?
- Consult your doctor who will confirm the diagnosis and decide about treatment.
- Tell your doctor that you have been in contact with outside water, and are worried that you may have leptospirosis.

How soon can someone with the illness return to school or work?
Once a person is feeling well. With usual hygiene there is no reason why others would be infected.