

HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR FRESHWATER ANGLERS



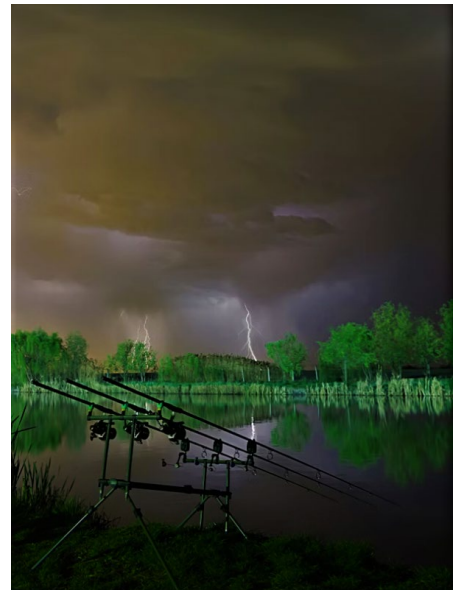
[Click here for saltwater safety advice](#)

SAFETY TIPS FOR ANGLERS

- **Check the weather forecast** and weather conditions before you go fishing. Conditions can change quickly with heavy rain causing spates and making riverbanks unsafe.
- **Know exactly where you are.** Consider installing an OS locate app or the What3Words app for your smartphone or refer to a map.
- **Let someone know where you are going to fish**, especially if you are going to fish alone.
- **Let someone know when you are likely to return** and let them know if your plans change.
- **It may be sensible to take a fully charged mobile phone** and check signal strength, make sure you know who to call in an emergency.
- **Check that your fishing spot is safe before fishing.** Rivers are dynamic environments and riverbanks and riverbeds can erode, and river courses change. Just because it was safe previously doesn't mean that it still is.
- **Dress appropriately**, sturdy footwear, sun hat in hot weather and warm layers in cold weather.
- **Consider taking a change of clothes** or blanket in your car, in case you fall in.
- **Take hand sanitiser** to use before you eat and at the end of the session. Be aware of the risk from Weil's disease, bacteria, and pathogens.
- **Carry with you basic first aid supplies**, such as plasters, antiseptic wipes and/or antiseptic cream or gel. Remember to take with you any prescribed medicines that you would need to take during the course of a session.

RISKS FOR ANGLERS

- **Paths, Stiles, Bridges and Fences.** Take particular care when using some of the paths down to the riverbank as they can be very steep. Always take care when negotiating stiles, crossing bridges, and climbing fences. Beware of barbed wire and electric fences
- **Banks and platforms.** Beware of undercuts in banks and scouring around trees and other obstacles especially near deep water. Old or poorly maintained platforms can also be dangerous. If a wooden platform appears rotten, for example, avoid using it and report the hazard.
- **Power Lines.** Avoid fishing close to power lines and remember electricity can arc over considerable distances. Carbon rods and poles are excellent conductors of electricity, so always carry long objects, like fishing rods and poles, horizontally and parallel with the ground.
- **Lightning.** Do not fish during electric storms. In the event of an electrical storm stop fishing and lay rods on the ground and move to a place of safety as soon as possible.
- **Animals.** Bulls can be dangerous. Be especially careful in fields of cows with calves, which may act collectively to defend against perceived threats. Where parking is allowed in fields containing livestock be aware that they may rub against your car with metal ear tags or lick paintwork and cause serious



damage. Please ensure that all gates are closed and secure after you access them to prevent the escape of livestock.

- **Wading.** Only wade if it is safe and permitted. Water can be much deeper than it appears, and silt can be much deeper than you think. Take particular care when wading in deep or fast water and on rocky bottoms. Be vigilant for water hazards such as storm debris. Be aware that the water level of the river can rise very quickly, and falling in the water may cause drowning. The use of a wading staff, wading belt and buoyancy aid is recommended at all times when wading or near the water. Ensure your waders have suitable soles for the terrain.
- **Casting.** Always show consideration to other users and avoid contacting anyone with your back-cast. When fly fishing, always wear protective glasses or spectacles to protect your eyes from flies and hooks. Take special care in windy conditions. Always be careful when walking behind other anglers or when fishing near inexperienced anglers.



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- **Hooks and flies.** Hooks by their design are sharp and easily penetrate the skin. Their use brings them into contact with germs that can be injurious to health. Caution should be used when handling hooks, tying on, or removing. Rusty hooks should be avoided at all times. Weighted flies can cause unpredictable movement when casting and caution should be exercised to ensure they do not come into contact with yourself, fellow anglers, or the public.
 - **Unhooking fish.** Predatory fish such as perch, pike and zander can have sharp teeth, spines and gill covers. If they are not handled correctly, these features can all cause injury. To protect yourself and the fish from harm, always use suitable unhooking equipment and proceed with caution. See details of how to handle pike [here](#)
 - **Fish Handler's Disease.** This disease is caused by bacteria which live on fish scales and can enter the skin through small cuts or scrapes. Symptoms include a reddish-purple circle that develops around the area of the cut or scrape, pain, burning skin and itchiness near the broken skin. Joint stiffness and swelling of the lymph nodes develop as the infection advances. Cover any cuts and grazes with waterproof plasters before fishing. Clean any wounds as soon as possible.
 - **Lyme disease.** This disease is transmitted by ticks. Where there are significant populations of deer, ticks will be present. Cover your skin while walking outdoors and tuck your trousers into your socks. Use insect repellent on your clothes and skin,



products containing DEET are best. Stay on clear paths whenever possible. Wear light-coloured clothing so ticks are easier to see and brush off. You can familiarise yourself with the symptoms of tick-borne [Lyme Disease here](#).

- **Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis).** Weil's Disease is transmitted in rats' urine and affects 40-50 people in the UK each year. It can be fatal if not recognised. Never put your hands in your mouth after immersing in river water and never place bait or fishing line in your mouth. Wash your hands with soap and water or use a sanitiser before eating and after fishing. Don't leave food, ground bait or bait on the bank. Cover any cuts and grazes with waterproof plasters before fishing. Clean any wounds as soon as possible. Wear protective clothing. Shower as soon as possible if you've been in potentially infected water. Don't touch any dead animals, especially rats. If you do develop flu-like symptoms which persist, tell your doctor that you may have been exposed to Weil's Disease so that he/she can consider it in the diagnosis. You can familiarise yourself with the symptoms of [Weil's Disease here](#).



- **Other waterborne gastro-intestinal illness.** Waterborne diseases are conditions caused by pathogenic micro-organisms that are transmitted by water. These diseases can be spread while angling, bathing, washing, drinking water, or by eating food exposed to contaminated water. While diarrhoea and vomiting are the most commonly reported symptoms of waterborne illness, other symptoms can include skin, ear, respiratory, or eye problems. Illnesses

caused by contact with sewage pollution in rivers are increasingly common and of great concern. Never put wet lines in your mouth or any other items of tackle that have been in the water. Wash your hands with soap and water or use a sanitiser before eating and after fishing. Cover any cuts and grazes with waterproof plasters before fishing. Clean any wounds as soon as possible and wear protective clothing. Avoid drinking river water and if you do fall in, keep your mouth closed. Shower as soon as possible if you've been in potentially infected water. You can familiarise yourself with the symptoms of gastrointestinal illnesses such as [Salmonella and E. coli here](#) or [Giardiasis here](#).

- **Hepatitis A.** Hepatitis A is a liver infection that is spread in the faeces of an infected person. Untreated sewage presents a risk of transmission. With treatment most people who get it recover within a few months. Never put wet lines in your mouth or any other items of tackle that have been in the water. Wash your hands with soap and water or use a sanitizer before eating and after fishing. Avoid drinking river water and if you do fall in, keep your mouth closed. Familiarise yourself with the symptoms of [Hepatitis A here](#).
- **Covid-19.** Scientists have identified that the Covid-19 virus could be transmitted through faecal-contaminated river water. The infection risk depends on how long the sewage has been in the treatment system, the infection level of people within the community that contribute to the sewage, and what temperature the sewage experiences during its travel through the system. The risk will be increased the closer you are to the outfall, if you are downwind of the outfall, if you are in the water itself, and ingest the water or absorb it from spray or aerosols into your eyes. If you can smell the sewage, then you are too close and you should move away. NHS guidance and advice on [Covid-19 can be found here](#).
- **Blue-Green Algae / Cyanobacteria.** Cyanobacteria are usually found in late summer after extended periods of warm, settled weather and can be fatal to

smaller animals including dogs. In humans, they can cause eye irritation, dermatitis, and joint/muscle pain or, more seriously, gastro-enteritis, pneumonia, liver damage and certain neurological conditions. Never put wet lines in your mouth or any other items of tackle that have been in the water. Wash your hands with soap and water or use a sanitizer before eating and after fishing. Cover any cuts and grazes with waterproof plasters before fishing. Clean any wounds as soon as possible. Wear protective clothing. Avoid drinking river water and if you do fall in, keep your mouth closed. Shower as soon as possible if you've been in potentially infected water.

- **Giant Hogweed.** The sap of Giant Hogweed can cause quite severe blistering and skin burns which often result in long lasting scars. Sap in the eyes can cause temporary or even permanent blindness. Anglers should keep well away from any plants they find. Giant Hogweed can grow up to 4 metres tall and has



cow parsley type flower heads in the summer, serrated leaves, and thick hollow stems with purple blotches. If you do come into contact with the plant, you are advised to wash the affected areas immediately, keep them out of direct sunlight and seek medical advice at the earliest opportunity. Treatment

early in the reaction can reduce its severity but must be done after taking medical advice. Find out how to identify [Giant Hogweed here](#).

- **Mink and Otters.** The numbers of Mink and Otters on the riverbanks are increasing. Although both are more likely to stay well clear of human contact, they can be aggressive, particularly when protecting their young. In the very rare case of a bite, medical attention should be sought as soon as possible.
- **Rabies.** Anglers very occasionally hook bats, usually whilst in the process of casting at dusk or during darkness. If you do hook a bat, avoid touching it with your bare skin. If you think you may have been bitten or scratched, wash the wound immediately (preferably with soap, do NOT scrub the wound), and contact your doctor.
- **Snakes.** Adder bites can be serious. Do not touch snakes and do not put any part of your body into burrows, holes, stone walls, or other similar openings.
- **Insects.** Avoid wasp and hornet nests. and beehives. Wear insect repellent to reduce the risk of insect bites. Red ants have a painful sting and will attack if disturbed. Nests are common along riverbanks and anglers can easily set up on top of one without knowing. Be cautious and check for nests in the immediate area if you are setting up to fish in one place for the day.
- **Sunburn.** Sunburn can cause skin cancer and waterproof sun protection is recommended. Wear glasses and a broad brimmed hat to protect your eyes. Polarised glasses are best for reducing glare. Advice on how to protect yourself from the sun can be [found here](#).
- **Conflict.** Avoid conflict with other water users (canoeists, paddleboarders, wild swimmers etc.) and members of the public at all times. Listen and discuss politely but do not enter into any form of argument which could result in physical assault. Do not challenge suspected poachers, contact the club bailiff or river keeper and report to the Environment Agency incident hotline - 0800 80 70 60. More information on [reporting an environmental incident here](#).

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- **Night Fishing.** At night there is an increased risk of slips and trips. A suitable headtorch should be used to enable bank edges and footpaths to be seen.
 - **Bivvy Safety.** Always make sure your bivvy is well ventilated particularly if cooking or using a heater. Carbon Monoxide poisoning is a real danger when using gas appliances in such a small, enclosed space. Ideally cook outside of your bivvy and stay warm by wearing appropriate clothing and having a suitable sleeping bag. Also make sure your bivvy is safe from falling branches, particularly in high winds. Do not bivvy-up in fields with large livestock such as cows or bulls.
 - **Drowning.** The Royal Life Saving Society UK and the Angling Trust have joined forces in a bid to reduce drownings in our seas and waterways and to help everyone enjoy the water safely. [You can find more information here.](#)
 - **Fishing from Boats and Kayaks.** Only consider fishing from a boat if you are experienced or have an experienced boater or kayaker with you. Further information about safety when fishing from boats can be found [here](#). Full information about fishing from kayaks can be found [here](#).

The Angling Trust are a not-for-profit organisation representing anglers, fighting for fish, fishing and the environment. We are recognised by the Government as the National Governing Body for angling in England and partner with Visit Wales and Natural Resources Wales to promote Fishing in Wales. We are a member-based organisation made up of anglers of all disciplines providing a united front to represent, grow and protect our sport. By becoming a member of the Angling Trust you are helping to protect the waterways you fish in and the fish which live within them, ensuring their health and protection for future generations.

[Click here for more information about how to join the Angling Trust](#)