Appendix 2.1: Outdoor Diseases

Working in the natural environment in the UK exposes staff and customers to a wide variety of known outdoor diseases. Field Studies Council take great care to ensure that the risk of infection is managed through effective control measures. This ensures that the likelihood of becoming ill is very remote. Appropriate precautions and control measures should ensure that the risk of becoming ill is reduced to at least that of any other recreational visitor to the countryside. Known outdoor diseases will have appropriate risk assessments and be included within COSHH statements.

High standards of personal hygiene, the protection of cuts and abrasions from contact with infection sources and the management of eating and drinking are in the most effective control measures for the majority of these diseases.

You may find it useful to copy this information to parents or guardians of children taking part in a visit.

The risk of infection with one of the waterborne diseases because of attending a field course
Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection found worldwide. Weil's disease is one form most commonly acquired from water contaminated with rat urine. For some fieldwork, sampling of water which is of poor quality is essential to the investigation being undertaken. On lowland slow flowing freshwater streams the risk of Weil's disease (Leptospirosis) means that the same precautions as for poor water quality should be taken (even if the water quality itself is good). The risk of contracting such infections is very low. If any participant undertakes work or visits a site where there could be a possibility of infection they will be advised of the precautions they should take to minimise the likelihood of infection further.

If course participants develop any of the following symptoms within four weeks of their return from the field course they are advised to consult their family doctor, mentioning the possibility of Leptospirosis. Typical 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

Treatment by antibiotics in the early stages is completely effective.

The risk of infection with E coli because of visiting farms and farmland during a field trip

E. coli O157 is a bacterium that lives in the gut of animals. It can be transmitted via contact with infected animals or their faeces and can cause illness ranging from diarrhoea to kidney failure in humans. In some cases the illness can be fatal. Children under 5 and the elderly are most at risk from the more severe consequences of the disease. Faeces or faecal material may be present in soil, on grass, farm machinery, fences, buildings, water courses, footwear and clothing as well as on the hides and in the saliva of livestock.

The best way of reducing the likelihood of contracting the disease is to avoid contact with animal faeces or surfaces contaminated with faecal material. Avoiding touching livestock or allowing them

to lick you is also advisable. Thorough handwashing with water and soap is strongly advised and it is important to stress to your participants the importance of this before they eat or drink, and after removing footwear. We encourage visiting staff to assist with the supervision of hand washing for younger participants. Sanitising hand gels are considered a useful addition but are not a substitute for thorough hand washing.

We also recommend that participants bring a plastic bag to keep clothes that need washing separate from other clothes, until they can be taken home and washed.

Pregnant Women during the lambing season

Some infections can be passed from sheep and other animals (including cows and goats) to humans. If a pregnant woman becomes infected, it could harm her and her unborn baby's health.

These infections are uncommon in sheep and very rare in humans. The number of human pregnancies affected by contact with sheep is extremely small.

Although the risks are low, pregnant women should still avoid close contact with sheep during the lambing season which runs from January to April, although the risk is present at other times of the year.

The risk of infection from tick borne diseases because of attending a field course

As part of the field course, the group will almost certainly be visiting moorland or woodland field work sites. They will thereby increase the risk of coming into contact with diseases carried by our native wildlife – in particular various diseases transmitted by ticks.

The better known of these tick-borne diseases, Lyme Disease and Q Fever, are known to occur. Although mainly transmitted by the sheep tick (Ixodes ricinus), these diseases are especially associated with deer and the habitats they live in.

The risk of infection because of fieldwork is very slight. Although participants are sometimes bitten by ticks, provided they report this and appropriate action is taken, then any risk can be immediately minimised. We operate strict protocols with all groups to ensure this happens. Any ticks removed by Centre staff and are given to participants (in case they should be required by your GP).

If course participants develop any of the following symptoms within four weeks of their return from the field course they are advised to consult their family doctor, mentioning the possibility of Lyme Disease/Q Fever and that moorland/woodland fieldwork has been carried out. Typical symptoms include:

- a persistent rash around the site of the tick bite
- a feeling of having an influenza-like illness (N.B. later symptoms are varied in nature and severity)

Treatment by antibiotics is completely effective in the early stages of the disease.