

Health and Safety

Guidance for the Big River Watch

The **BIG** RIVER
WATCH



Health & Safety guidance

This guidance note provides an outline of best practice in terms of health and safety when taking part in The Big River Watch. This includes the risks you should be aware of when observing river health. You must never enter the river to make your observations. You should find somewhere safe near the river where there is no risk of you slipping into the water and enjoy some peaceful time observing river life – have fun!

In an emergency please contact the emergency services – 999

Your responsibility

Whilst taking part in *The Big River Watch* survey you have the responsibility of ensuring that you are considering your own health and safety and the health and safety of others around you. You should not put yourself in a position that could place you, or others, in danger. You are under no obligation to participate in or continue with the survey if it is not safe to do so. You are under no obligation to visit a particular site. If you have any health and safety concerns about the survey, you should stop the survey and raise your concerns with The Rivers Trust data@theriverstrust.org

Risk assessment

Before undertaking the *The Big River Watch* survey, you should consider the health and safety hazards associated with the site where you are observing the river and whether individual circumstances or any medical conditions expose you to particular hazards. Generic areas of risk

when undertaking the *The Big River Watch* survey are given below. However, you should identify the potential risks specific to the site you are visiting and apply practical precautions to minimise the level of any risks. You should also pass this health and safety information on to anyone else who is helping you undertake the survey.

Access permission

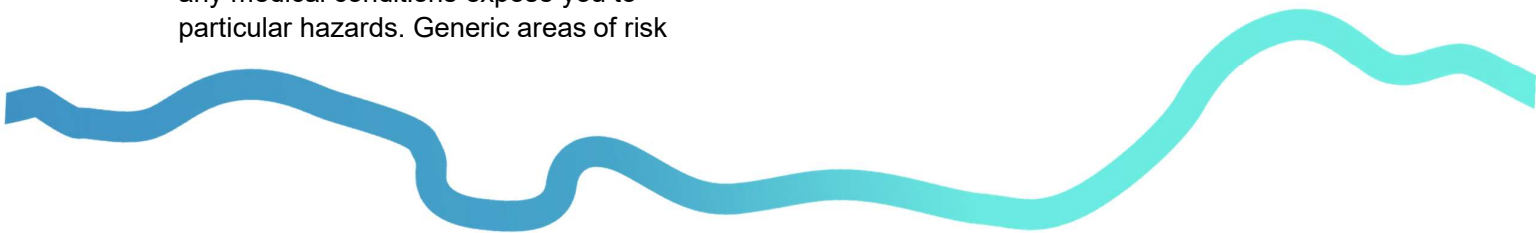
You may not need permission to observe a river that can be accessed from a public footpath, or where the river is within open access land. Do not access private land unless you can contact the landowner to explain what you are doing and why and don't continue with the survey if access permission is refused. In all cases, please abide by The Countryside Code www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk.

Parking

When visiting a site take care to park cars sensibly, preferably off-road, and do not block entrances.

Mobile phones

It is advisable to carry a mobile phone, as they may be useful in case of an emergency. Please note that mobile phones may not work in some remote areas. In case of an emergency you can use either the European Emergency Number (112) or 999 (see www.eena.org for more information). 112 can be dialled even if the keypad is locked.



Making your observations

River habitats can be dangerous places with deep water, steep and slippery banks, unsafe floating mats of vegetation and fast flowing water. Any survey near water includes a serious risk of injury or drowning. **You should never enter the water to make your observations.**

Always find a safe position near the river where you can make your observations without risk that you could slip and enter the water accidentally. Remember that:

- Rivers may be surrounded by dense vegetation which can be a trip hazard, or cause abrasions to the body, face and eyes. Don't bend or kneel in areas of known sharp grasses or plants.
- Approach rivers where the flow is slow (e.g. near a bridge or from the shallows).
- Never attempt to observe rivers which are swollen following heavy rainfall.
- Do not observe the river from areas that present a particular danger (i.e. steep slopes, cliffs, unstable banks and rivers during flood).
- We recommend that you should always undertake **The Big River** watch survey in pairs.

Lone working Code of Practice

Always leave a note of your whereabouts with a responsible person (buddy system). For health and safety reasons we recommend that you should always undertake **The Big River Watch** survey in pairs. If you find it necessary to carry out a survey alone or you are accompanied, but working in a remote place, please ensure you have left the following details with a responsible person and make sure they know how to raise the alarm if you do not return to your base when expected.

Details should include: date and time of departure, method of travel to and around the survey site, proposed itinerary,

expected time of leaving the site and return to base, and vehicle identification details. The person to whom these details are given should be told who to contact if you do not return and at what time to raise the alarm.

Under 18s

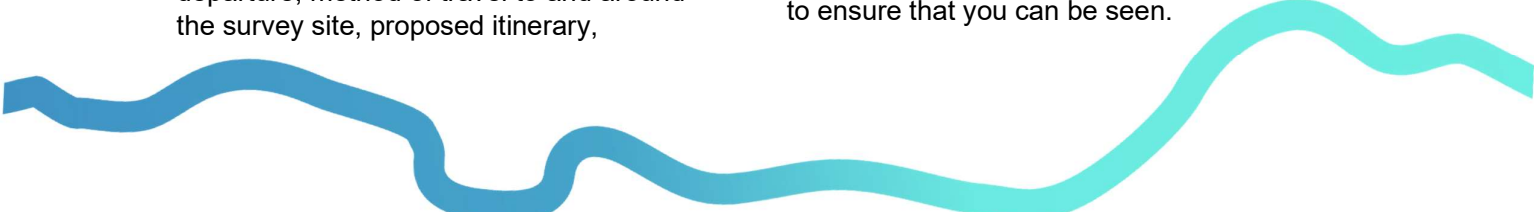
Under 18s can take part in the **The Big River Watch** survey if they are accompanied by a responsible adult. There is no age limit on taking part in **The Big River Watch** survey, but we would advise that parents or guardians inform their child of the associated risks and accompany them – read the guidance, have fun, stay safe!

General precautions

Check weather reports before you go out and wear appropriate clothing e.g. wellington boots and long-sleeved clothes and trousers to prevent scratches and nettle stings. In hot weather use sun protection including a wide-brimmed hat and sun screen. Make sure you drink plenty of water and take food if out for long periods of time. Avoid or abandon outdoor activities in bad weather.

Difficult terrain and traffic

Take special care when carrying out **The Big River Watch** survey along watercourses, cliff edges, or in areas that contain boggy ground, reed beds, loose rocks or areas with underground burrows (e.g. badger and rabbit holes) often found along field edges. Do not cross potentially hazardous sites, such as quarries, ravines and railway lines. Please heed warning signs and do not enter private (non-access) land that has been deliberately obstructed by fencing or barbed wire. Take care when crossing roads or making observation near roads or bridleways. Always be alert when walking in areas of poor visibility that may be used by motorbikes or horses. Wear bright clothing to ensure that you can be seen.



Livestock and agricultural machinery

Take special care when entering areas with livestock, especially cattle, rams and horses. If livestock are likely to be present on the site do not take a dog with you to do **The Big River Watch** survey. Do not enter fields containing bulls. Rutting deer can also be aggressive in the autumn. Avoid undertaking The Big River Watch survey in close proximity to working agricultural machinery or forestry operations.

Human confrontation and dogs

Consider your personal safety when taking **The Big River Watch** survey within the vicinity of known or likely trouble spots. Avoid confrontation with landowners, land workers or members of the public. Be wary of dogs off leads. Disinfect any bites and seek medical attention. If you have any concerns about your personal safety, do not continue with the survey.

Adders

Check the area you are visiting to see whether adders are likely to be present. Take care to look at the ground when kneeling or placing your hands on the ground. Wear stout boots. Take extra care when lifting debris from the ground.

Waterborne diseases

Working near water is a potential source of disease including leptospirosis or Weil's disease, hepatitis A and tetanus. In all cases the best preventative measures are:

- Be aware of where and how these diseases can be caught and take precautions based on this knowledge.
- Ensure tetanus jabs are up to date.
- Ensure that any cuts on hands are covered with waterproof plasters, and carefully clean and cover any

cuts or grazes that occur whilst working in water.

- Wear protective clothing such as gloves.
- Avoid ingestion of water.
- Ensure that hands are washed after contact with water especially before eating, drinking or smoking.
- If you have accidentally entered the water, wash thoroughly and as soon as possible.
- If feeling unwell after taking part in the survey, seek medical attention and notify them of the activities you have undertaken.

Lyme's disease is a bacterial disease transmitted by animal ticks associated with rank vegetation, which can lead to severe symptoms if left untreated. A variety of animals act as hosts for the bacteria, including sheep, deer and pheasants. Make regular checks of skin and hair. Remove ticks from the skin as soon as possible. Wear light-coloured clothing so that ticks are visible, tuck trousers into socks so that ticks cannot attach or climb up the inside of clothing without being seen. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lyme-disease/>

Tetanus is a serious but rare condition caused by bacteria getting into a wound. It may result from the infection of even minor wounds and scratches with *Clostridium tetani*, a common micro-organism in soil. The symptoms include muscle spasm, stiffness and fever, and can be fatal if left untreated. The most effective treatment is to ensure you have been fully vaccinated, but if you are unsure about your vaccination status or concerned about a wound you should contact your GP or visit your nearest minor injuries unit. For more information visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tetanus/>

Weil's disease (leptospirosis) is an uncommon bacterial infection spread by animals, but the risk is increased if you regularly come into contact with rivers. The organism is carried by rats and other

animals, and excreted in their urine. Many people only experience mild flu-like symptoms but the condition can be very serious in others and even fatal if left untreated, so if you experience any symptoms check with your GP. You can avoid the risk of Weil's disease by washing your hands thoroughly after taking your water samples and by cleaning and covering wounds before you collect the sample (e.g. by wearing latex free gloves). For more information visit:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/leptospirosis/>

By accepting to survey for **The Big River Watch** it is assumed that this risk assessment has been read, and that you will take all possible care to assess and avoid the hazards listed and perform the survey in a safe manner. If any incidents, accidents or near-accidents occur during the course of your survey, please ensure you contact **The Big River Watch** team as soon as possible, data@theriverstrust.org





The Rivers Trust
Contact: data@theriverstrust.org

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