

Stay safe: waste water hygiene

By safely disposing of your liquid waste, you are helping to protect the natural environment. But it's important to protect yourself and others too.

Most waste water assets are designed to minimise contact with sewage. However, working in the waste water industry puts you at greater risk of being exposed to a variety of water-borne diseases and you should always remain vigilant and maintain good hygiene.

Sewage and untreated sewage sludge contain potentially harmful micro-organisms such as parasites, bacteria and viruses which can enter your body through your mouth, nose and eyes or through cuts in your skin.

Exposure to sewage can lead to illnesses such as:

- **Gastroenteritis** - symptoms include stomach pains, nausea, fever, diarrhoea and vomiting
- **Weil's disease** (also known as leptospirosis) - symptoms are similar to flu with persistent or severe headache. Weil's disease is spread through rat urine and can damage your liver, kidneys and blood and can be fatal
- **Hepatitis** - symptoms include yellow discoloration of the skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice), loss of appetite, vomiting, fatigue, fever, stomach pain, and diarrhoea
- **Occupational asthma** - symptoms include breathlessness, wheezing and tightening of the chest
- **Inflammation of the lungs** - symptoms include shortness of breath, persistent cough, fatigue, poor appetite, and coughing up blood or mucus
- **Eye and skin infections**

Reduce the risk of infection:

- Avoid direct contact with sewage
- Always clean exposed cuts and grazes and apply a sterile adhesive waterproof bandage before you begin work. The bandage should be checked and changed regularly to ensure it continues to protect your skin from contamination
- Always wear appropriate protective clothing such as overalls, abrasion-resistant gloves, footwear, visor or safety glasses
- Avoid touching your face, mouth, eyes or nose with contaminated gloves or hands
- Wash your hands thoroughly before eating, drinking or smoking
- Change out of contaminated clothing before eating or going outside the work environment.

Please seek medical attention immediately after suffering cuts or penetrating injuries; or have flu-like illnesses or fever, particularly when associated with severe headaches and skin infections.

