

Wednesday 22nd May, 2024

Dear Students and Parents,

We are writing to make you aware that unfortunately a local student has recently suffered a severe infection after swimming in the River Stour at Dedham, and has been very poorly. This is a confirmed case of Weils Disease (Leptospirosis) which can be very serious. It is spread in the urine of infected animals such as rats and cows, and you can acquire Leptospirosis if soil or freshwater (such as water from a river) that contains infected urine gets in your mouth.

The Environment Agency are currently undertaking monitoring in the river at Dedham and, once received, we will share their findings on the Dedham Parish Council website. Further information on the water quality of the River Stour may also be found through PACE Manningtree, an active local environmental group investigating the impact of untreated sewage released into the river by the sewage works at Dedham.

In addition to the risks of Weils Disease and pollution, we would like to take this opportunity to share other serious safety concerns that we have regarding the river site at Mill Lane;

- Accidents are a regular occurrence, and a young boy gashed his foot open just this weekend. Litter, including glass bottles and cans are regularly left behind both in and out of the water causing significant safety hazards as well as having a detrimental environmental impact.
- Many children choose to jump from the bridge into the river, and may be unaware that the water levels change and can be dangerously shallow.
- There are reports of metalwork underneath the bridge as well as swimmers, paddleboarders and wooden boats passing through, with no clear line of sight possible prior to jumping. If someone jumping were to injure either themselves or someone passing underneath, the consequences could be serious and even fatal.
- There are no lifeguards and often children and teenagers are present without parental supervision, sometimes under the influence of alcohol.
- There have been a number of serious near misses where children have thankfully been rescued from drowning by members of the public.
- Tragically, and most important of all, we would like to remind you that historically there have been a number of deaths in Mill Pond in Dedham. We are also devastated by the news that a 14 year old boy drowned last weekend in the River Tyne, and a second remains in a critical condition.

We will continue to work with Stratford St Mary Parish Council, Suffolk County Council, the Environment Agency and others to drive safety awareness, improvements and liability. In the meantime, we want to ensure that you are aware of the risks involved before choosing to swim at Dedham. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and we hope it helps to keep you all informed, well and safe when enjoying the local area.

Yours faithfully,
Dedham Parish Council