



Lenawee County
HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

SWIMMERS ITCH FACT SHEET

What is Swimmers Itch?

Swimmers itch is caused by an allergic reaction by parasites found in some birds and mammals. The parasites are released into fresh and salt water from infected snails. The parasite causes an allergic reaction and rash.

People can be exposed to the parasites when working, wading or swimming in lakes and streams.

What are the symptoms?

- Tingling, burning or itching of the skin
- Small red spots on the skin which begin to itch within 12 hours of exposure
- Severity of rash varies from person to person
- Itching may last up to a week or more

How can it be prevented?

- **Avoid** still, fresh water during the mid-summer and fall months– especially on warm days
- **Avoid** swimming in water which has a high number of ducks, geese, shore birds or snails
- **Do not** feed ducks or geese. Feeding them will bring them close to the shore where the parasite can spread.

How can it be spread?

- Direct contact with water that is contaminated with the parasites
- **It cannot be spread from person to person**

How it is treated?

If you find yourself itching after swimming:

- Get out and towel-off briskly; this helps remove the tiny larvae that cause the itch
- Shower as soon as possible after the swim
- **Avoid** scratching because it may lead to an infection

If itching continues for a period of time, see your health care provider for additional treatment

Treatments that may help

- Anti-itch or over the counter corticosteroid cream
- Apply a baking soda paste (baking soda and water) to rash
- Oatmeal bath
- Apply a cool compress