

SWIMMER'S ITCH FACT SHEET

What is swimmer's itch?

Swimmer's itch is caused by an allergic reaction to 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?

Symptoms may include:

- 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, but will gradually go away

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.
- **After swimming:**
 - Briskly towel-off immediately; this helps remove the tiny larvae that cause the itch.
 - Shower as soon as possible.

How is it spread?

- Direct contact with water that is contaminated with the parasites

It cannot be spread from person to person.

How is it treated?

- Apply anti-itch or over the counter corticosteroid cream.
- Apply a baking soda paste (baking soda and water) to rash.
- Take an oatmeal bath.
- Apply a cool compress.
- Avoid scratching because it may lead to an infection.

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

More Information: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/swimmersitch>

This FACT SHEET is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a healthcare provider. For more information call your healthcare provider.

3/2023

