



PUBLIC FACT SHEET

SWIMMER'S ITCH

What is swimmer's itch?

Swimmer's itch is an infection caused by contact with water infected with a flat worm parasite (*Schistosoma*).

How is swimmer's itch spread?

Swimmer's itch is spread through contact with infected lake water. Flat worm larvae that cause swimmer's itch are released into the water by infected snails and some birds and mammals.

What are possible symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- The skin may feel prickly as the larvae penetrated the skin.
- Mild to moderate itching occurs at the site of penetration a few hours later.
- The itching may disappear for 10-15 hours and then become very intense.
- The itching may last up to one week.

A person's first exposure to infected water may not cause an itchy rash. Repeat exposure increases a person's sensitivity to the parasite.

How is swimmer's itch diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made based on symptoms and history of exposure to lake water.

What is the treatment for swimmer's itch?

There is no specific treatment for swimmer's itch. An antihistamine may relieve the itching. Hydrocortisone cream may also ease itching.

How can I prevent swimmer's itch?

- Towel off immediately after swimming or wading in water that may be infected.
- Swim in water away from the shore
- Avoid swimming in areas where snails have accumulated
- Don't encourage birds to stay in the swimming areas by feeding them

For more information on swimmer's itch:

Ottawa County Health Department

www.miOttawa.org

Hope College's

Swimmer's Itch: The Authorized Home Page

www.hope.edu/swimmersitch