

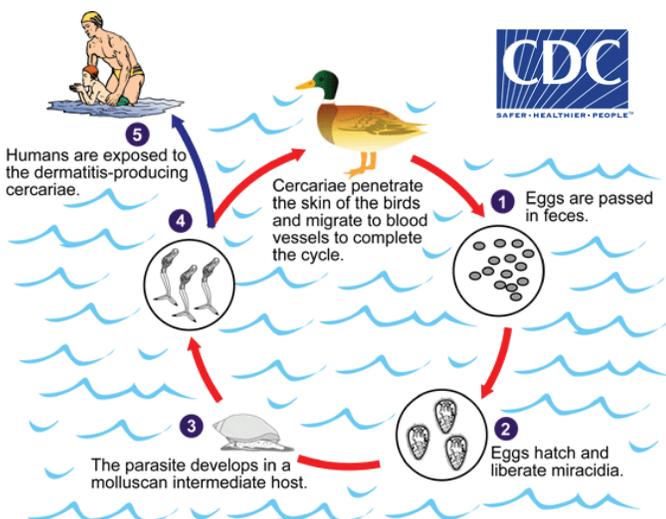
A skin disease, commonly called “Swimmer’s Itch” has been reported among many bathers using the lakes in Washington State.

Swimmer’s Itch (schistosome cercarial dermatitis) is caused by the larva of a small aquatic parasite. The adult parasite exists in water fowl such as ducks and geese, and is also found in aquatic animals like beaver and muskrat.

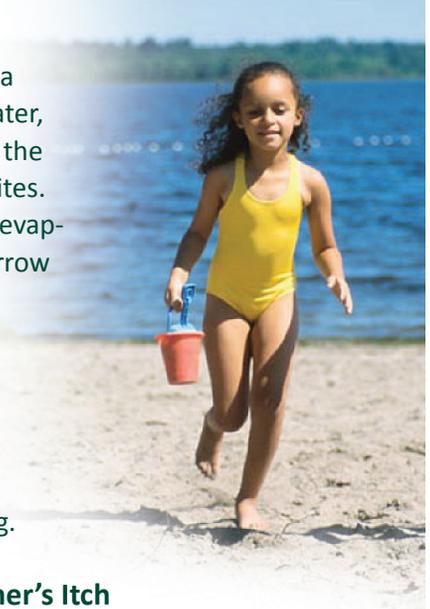
Parasite Life Cycle

Eggs produced by the adult parasites develop in the intestinal tract of the host bird or animal and are excreted into the water with the droppings. The eggs then hatch into larval forms which swim about in search of the usual, secondary host, a particular species of aquatic snail. If the larva finds the snail, it penetrates the tissue, undergoes several developmental changes, and emerges as a slightly larger, free-swimming form. This form will then infect or re-infect aquatic birds or animals, or sometimes man.

Humans are not natural hosts for the parasitic larvae but may accidentally become involved when swimming in



infested waters. When a swimmer leaves the water, moisture remaining on the skin may contain parasites. As the water begins to evaporate, the parasites burrow into the skin. Because human tissues are not suitable for development, the parasites die, often causing an allergic reaction, with rash and intense itching.



Symptoms of Swimmer’s Itch

Within five minutes to an hour of leaving the water, a swimmer may experience a sharp burning and itching of the affected skin areas. Small reddish pimples, surrounded by zones of redness, appear within 12 hours. By the second day, some of the pimples can develop into small blisters which itch intensely. Itching usually subsides within a week or so; however, in some cases, as long as 30 days may be required for complete recovery.

Treatment

Treatment for the itching is by application of calamine lotion and administration of antihistamines like benadryl. Trim and clean children’s fingernails to prevent additional infection.

Precautions for Swimmers

The parasites causing swimmer’s itch are widely disseminated in lakes and ponds throughout the northwest. A simple but very effective method can be used to avoid being infected. Dry off immediately after leaving the water! Using towels or the palms of the hands to remove water from the skin’s surface will also remove the parasites before they have a chance to burrow in. Infested lakes can be safely used if this precaution is taken.