



SWIMMER'S ITCH FACT SHEET

What is Swimmers Itch?

- Swimmer's Itch (Schistosome Cercarial Dermatitis) is caused by a tiny larval flatworm entering human skin.
- The flatworm is unable to infect a human; it is seeking a water bird.
- Shortly after entering a human's skin, the flatworm dies. In some people an allergic reaction follows penetration into the skin.
- Entry can be felt as a dull, prickly, and itchy sensation. In sensitized individuals a small, reddened area will develop at the site of entry.
- Intermittent periods of itching will continue for several days.
- After about 24 hours, the reddened areas reach their largest size.
- After a week, the reddened areas usually disappear; leaving a spot that resembles a small bruise.



What is the treatment for Swimmer's Itch?

While all cases do not require treatment, some people may seek relief by :

- Cool compresses
- Bath with 1/2 cup of baking soda
- Baking soda paste to the rash
- Colloidal oatmeal baths, such as Aveeno*
- Anti-itch lotion (consult a pharmacist)
- Calamine* lotion (consult a pharmacist)
- Corticosteroid cream (consult a pharmacist)
- Antihistamine medication (consult a physician or pharmacist)

Scratching the rash can cause serious infections! Don't scratch!

To avoid Swimmer's Itch:

- Towel down right after leaving the water to help remove the parasite.
- Avoid areas with lots of plants or submerged cement.
- Wind can concentrate parasites in shallow beach areas.
- Continuous swimming along the shore should be avoided. The flatworm may float to the surface of the water and drift with the wind to accumulate along the shore.
- Children who continually go in and out of the shallow water are most likely to get swimmers itch.

Swimmer's Itch cannot be spread from person to person.