



Swimmers Itch

What is Swimmer's Itch?

Swimmer's itch is an illness that presents with itching and a rash. It is caused by the larvae of a schistosome worm that penetrates the skin. The primary carriers and transmitters of this schistosome worm are ducks, geese, gulls, swans, muskrats, and beavers. Humans can be exposed to the larvae when wading or swimming in contaminated lakes and streams, especially along shallow shorelines.

How is Swimmer's Itch spread?

Swimmer's itch is spread by direct contact with water that is contaminated with the larvae. The itch can be very annoying, but does not usually result in serious illness. Symptoms are usually gone within a week as larvae die.

How is Swimmer's Itch treated?

If you find yourself itching after swimming:

- Get out of the water and towel-off briskly. This helps to remove the tiny larvae which cause the itch.
- Shower as soon as possible after a swim.
- Treatment is only supportive with over the counter anti-itching creams or ointments, cool compresses, baking soda paste, and soaking in a bath of epsom salts, baking soda, or colloidal oatmeal.
- In cases of severe or persistent itching, see your doctor for additional treatment.

How can Swimmer's Itch be prevented?

- Avoid still pools of water during the mid-summer and fall months, especially on warm days. Such pools, and other waterways which have a high number of ducks, geese, or shorebirds plus snails, have a higher chance of being contaminated with the larvae.

- Do not feed ducks and geese. Feeding ducks and geese brings them close to shore where they can spread the disease.
- Do not swim or wade in shallow marshy areas where snails are found.

Symptoms of Swimmer's Itch:

- A dull prickly sensation as the larvae burrow into the skin.
- Small red spots or blisters appear on the skin which begins to tingle, burn, or itch.
- Scratching may cause the rash to become infected.

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CDC Public Information

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