

## **Swimmer's Itch (schistosome dermatitis)**

### **What is swimmer's itch?**

Swimmer's itch is a rash that results when certain types of blood flukes (parasitic worms), called schistosomes, penetrate the skin. The infection is reported in many parts of the world where people swim in lakes, including the Great Lakes region in North America, and in certain coastal beaches in California and Hawaii.

### **How do you get swimmer's itch?**

You get it by swimming or wading in waters contaminated with the parasitic blood fluke. The larval stage of certain schistosomes of birds and mammals penetrates human skin and causes intense itching. The risk of being infected is greater when the water is calm and the temperature is warm. Although anyone can get swimmer's itch, children are infected more often than adults. Person-to-person spread does not occur.

### **What are the symptoms of swimmer's itch?**

A tingling sensation can often be felt when the flukes penetrate the skin. Mild to moderate itching occurs at the site of penetration. This itching can become more intense in the following days or weeks. Sometimes, a slightly bumpy rash develops. The symptoms are intensified in individuals who have had previous exposure to blood flukes.

### **When do symptoms start?**

The first symptoms can begin within a few minutes to a few hours of exposure to the blood

fluke. Severe itching and a rash may follow 5 to 14 days after exposure.

### **What is the treatment for swimmer's itch?**

While most cases do not require treatment, some individuals may get relief by applying skin lotions or creams to reduce the itching.

### **How do you keep from getting it?**

Avoid swimming in streams, ponds, lakes, or coastal areas known to be infested with schistosomes.

Prevent exposure to schistosome-infested waters by using protective gear such as rubber wading boots.

If exposed to fluke-infested water, promptly and vigorously towel-dry any skin surface that was exposed to the contaminated water.

Apply isopropyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol) immediately after exposure to fluke-infested water in order to help prevent attachment of flukes to the skin surface.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/swimmersitch/faqs.html>

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