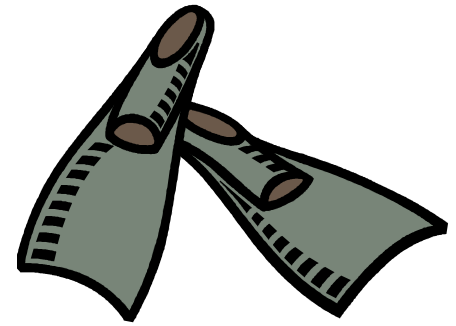


Swimmer's Itch



What is Swimmer's Itch?

Swimmer's Itch is a skin rash caused by tiny worms called Cercariae (Cer-car-iae). They are found in ponds, lakes, and sometimes in the Ocean. These worms are common throughout North America.

How do you get swimmer's itch?

The worms that cause Swimmer's Itch live in the gut of birds [such as ducks, and some animals, such as beavers]. As the worm grows, it lays eggs in the water with the bird's feces. Larvae hatch from the eggs and look for snails in which to grow. After the larvae have grown into baby worms, they leave the snail and try to burrow into other birds. Some times they get into the skin of swimmers by mistake (see figure 1). This can cause Swimmer's Itch. Swimmer's Itch is not communicable, meaning you cannot catch it from someone else.

How can I avoid getting swimmer's itch?

The best way to avoid getting swimmer's itch is to avoid swimming where the worms are living. Check for a warning sign near the water, or ask the park owner if other campers have had Swimmer's Itch.

You can also avoid swimming in ponds or lakes where there are a lot of water plants. These plants are great homes for snails and swimmer's itch worms.

If you decide to swim in ponds or lakes, you should:

- Avoid swimming on bright mornings with onshore wind, as worms are more active at this time.
- Dry off well with a towel as soon as you leave the water. This will help to remove any of the worms on your skin before they burrow in with the drying water.
- Avoid swimming for a long time in shallow water. Move around often while in the water.

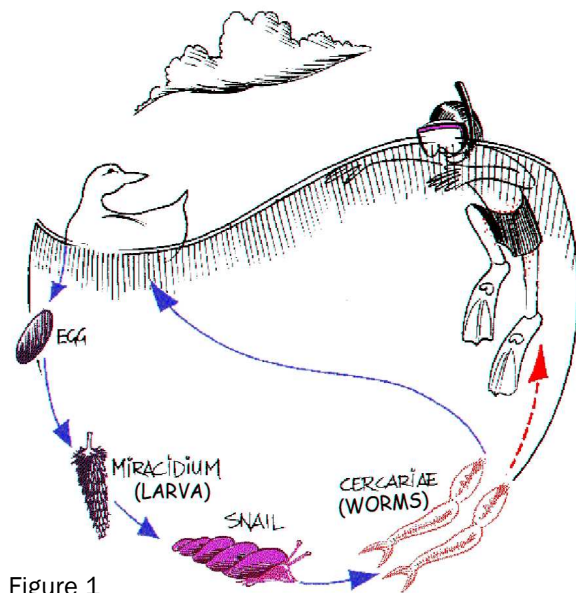


Figure 1

Note: Children are more likely to get swimmer's itch because their skin is more sensitive, they play in shallow water, and enter and exit the water more often.

What are the signs and symptoms?

You may not notice your first contact with swimmer's itch worms. But if they attach to you again, your body will be more sensitive and may react with these signs:

- Brief tingling on your skin.
- Mild swelling of the skin eight or ten hours later.
- Itchy red spots.
- Skin rash.

The swelling can last for about a week, but the itching usually lasts for a couple of days. These symptoms often go away on their own after about two weeks, but scratching could cause an infection.

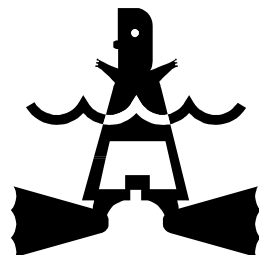
What should I do if I get swimmer's itch?

If you get swimmer's itch, you should avoid scratching which could make the rash worse. An anti-itch cream or lotion could be used for some relief. If the itching lasts for more than three days, or if the rash gets worse, see a doctor.

Please call the Government Service Centre or Regional Health and Community Services office nearest you to report any cases of swimmer's itch. If needed, Environmental Health Officers will post warning signs near the affected swimming area. This will help to let other people know about the risk of getting swimmer's itch in the water where you swam.

Will this lake always cause swimmers itch?

There are many factors involved in the lifecycle of Cercariae. Swimmer's Itch can appear and disappear with out warning. Some lakes are known to cause Swimmer's Itch regularly and others never have. Some lakes go trough periods of high activity and then return to a normal state sporadically.



Where can I find out more?

If you have any questions about recreational water quality, please do not hesitate to contact the Government Services Centre or Regional Health Authority nearest you.



**Department of Health and Community Services
Department of Environment and Conservation
Department of Government Services
Regional Health Authorities
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