



Fact Sheet: Swimmer's Itch

What is Swimmer's Itch?

Swimmer's itch is caused by the larvae of a schistosome worm, which burrow into the skin. The primary hosts of this schistosome worm are ducks and geese. Humans can be exposed to the larvae when working, wading or swimming in lakes and streams.

What are the symptoms?

- A dull prickly sensation as the larvae burrow into the skin
- Small red spots on the skin which begin to itch and cause a rash commonly called "swimmer's itch"
- Severity of the rash can vary from person to person
- Symptoms are usually gone in a few days
- Symptoms can increase in severity with reinfection

How is it spread?

- Swimmer's itch is spread by direct contact with water that is contaminated with the larvae.
- **It cannot be spread from person to person.**

How is it treated?

If you find yourself itching after swimming:

- Get out and towel-off briskly; this helps to remove the tiny larvae that cause the itch.
- Shower as soon as possible after a swim.
- Treatment is supportive only, with over the counter anti-itching ointments or creams.
- If itching becomes prolonged, see your doctor for additional treatment.

How is it prevented?

- Avoid still pools of non-chlorinated water during the mid-summer and fall months, especially on warm days.
- Waterways, which have a high number of ducks, geese, shore birds or snails, have a higher chance of being contaminated.

Do not feed ducks and geese. Feeding ducks and geese bring them close to shore where they can spread the disease.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or 257-3612.

Visit our website at: www.gchd.us or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

Genesee County Health Department

630 S. Saginaw Street
Flint, Michigan 48502-1540

"Better Life through Better Health"