

## WHAT IS SWIMMER'S ITCH?

- ✓ Swimmer's itch is an irritation officially called "Schistosome cercarial dermatitis", sometimes incorrectly called "chiggers" which is caused by a mite like critter in grass.
- ✓ The flatworm larvae ("cercarie") is from the family Schistosomatidae.
- ✓ The flatworm uses snails and waterfowl as hosts. In its transition from snail to waterfowl it can latch onto humans.
- ✓ When our skin dries the larvae will burrow into our skin to avoid dehydration; this is what causes the itch.
- ✓ The larvae will die because humans are not its intended host.
- ✓ Swimmer's itch arises when the water temperature hits above approximately 72 °F.

## THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE ITCH

- ✓ Although the snails carry the flatworm larvae, they also bioaccumulate many toxins such as trace metals (Cr, Cd, Pb, Cu, Fe, Mn, Zn), organochlorine pesticides, and other contaminants. Lots of snails means that these contaminate levels are low!
- ✓ Only 30-40% of people are sensitive to the itch.
- ✓ The worm's size? About 250  $\mu\text{m}$ . That's thinner than a human hair (around 100  $\mu\text{m}$ )!
- ✓ Most cercariae are released during 12 pm to 2 pm, at the rate of about 4000 released per infected snail.

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## SWIMMER'S ITCH:

### A BRIEF OVERVIEW AND TIPS ON PREVENTION



Provided by the  
Geneva Lake Environmental  
Agency  
Summer 2023

## HOW TO AVOID SWIMMER'S ITCH

- ✓ Do not feed ducks and other waterfowls. This will attract them to beaches.
- ✓ Try to avoid swimming in shallow, weedy water. This is the snail's ideal habitat.
- ✓ Towel dry immediately after leaving the water. This may crush the larvae and prevent them from penetrating into the skin.
- ✓ Take a shower to cleanse the skin after swimming in a lake.
- ✓ Do not air dry; this will allow the larvae to burrow into the skin to escape dehydration.
- ✓ Using a waterproof sunscreen may help to prevent the larvae from burrowing, but it should only be used in conjunction with other preventative measures listed above.

## HOW TO TREAT SWIMMER'S ITCH

- ✓ Do not scratch. Itching can break the skin and lead to an infection.
- ✓ Apply an antihistamine lotion to temporarily relieve itching.
- ✓ Don't worry; swimmer's itch is rarely a major health concern and will pass in a few days. If not or the condition worsens contact your physician.

### Additional Resources:

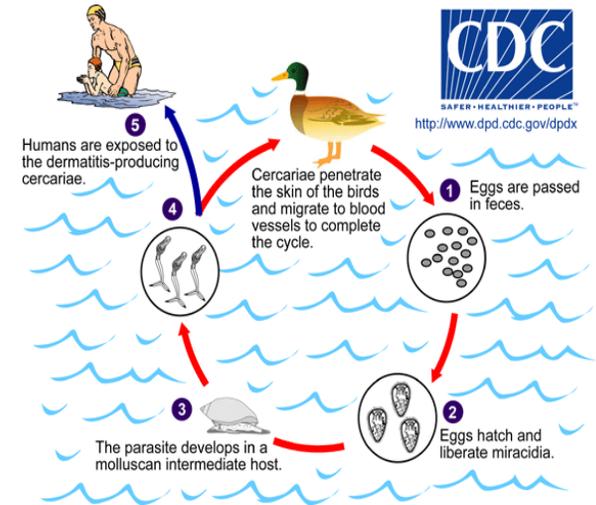
Wisconsin DNR:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/lakes/swimmersitch/>

WI Department of Health Services

<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/>

TOWEL DRYING IS THE  
SIMPLEST THING YOU CAN  
DO TO PREVENT  
SWIMMER'S ITCH!



- 1) Blood fluke carried by bird
- 2) Eggs
- 3) Snail Host
- 4) Larvae seek out bird host
- 5) Larvae accidentally latch onto humans

Feel free to contact us!

