



What is swimmers' itch?

Swimmers' Itch (cercarial dermatitis), appears as a skin rash caused by an allergic reaction to certain parasites that infect some birds and mammals. These microscopic parasites are released from infected snails into lakes and ponds. If the parasite comes in contact with a swimmer, it burrows into the skin and causes an allergic reaction and a rash. The more often you swim or wade in contaminated water, the more likely you are to develop serious symptoms.

How does the water become infested with the parasite?

The adult parasite lives in the blood of infected animals such as ducks, geese, gulls, swans and certain aquatic mammals such as muskrats and beavers. The parasites produce eggs that are passed in the feces of infected birds or mammals.

What are the signs and symptoms of swimmers' itch?

- Tingling, burning or itching of skin
- Small reddish pimples
- Small blisters

What is the treatment for swimmers' itch?

Most cases of swimmers' itch do not require medical attention. For relief you may:

- Use corticosteroid cream
- Apply cool compresses in affected area
- Bathe in Epsom salts or baking soda
- Apply baking soda paste (baking soda and water stirred until it is a paste-like consistency) to the rash.
- Avoid scratching, as this may cause the rash to become infected.

If itching is severe, your health care provider may suggest prescription strength creams to relieve the symptoms.

Who is at risk for swimmers' itch?

Anyone who swims or wades in infested water may be at risk. Larvae are more likely to be present in shallow water by the shoreline.

What can be done to reduce the risk of swimmers' itch?

- Do not swim in areas that swimmers itch has been found
- Do not swim in areas where snails are commonly found
- Towel dry and shower immediately after leaving the water
- Do not feed birds in areas that people swim
- Post signs on shoreline where swimmers' itch is a current problem