



SWIMMER'S ITCH

WHAT IS SWIMMER'S ITCH?

Swimmer's itch (also called 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 fresh and salt water (such as lakes, ponds, and oceans). While the parasite's preferred host is the specific bird or mammal, if the parasite encounters a swimmer, it burrows into the skin causing an allergic reaction and rash. Swimmer's itch is found throughout the world and is more frequent during summer months. Most cases of swimmer's itch do not require medical attention.

WHO CAN GET SWIMMER'S ITCH?

Anyone can get swimmer's itch if exposed to the parasite's larva.

WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF SWIMMER'S ITCH?

Symptoms of swimmer's itch may include:

- tingling, burning, or itching of the skin
- small reddish pimples
- small blisters

HOW IS SWIMMER'S ITCH SPREAD?

Swimmer's itch is not contagious and cannot be spread from one person to another.

Within minutes to days after swimming in contaminated water, you may experience tingling, burning, or itching of the skin. Small reddish pimples appear within twelve hours. Pimples may develop into small blisters. Scratching the areas may result in secondary bacterial infections. Itching may last up to a week or more, but will gradually go away.

Because swimmer's itch is caused by an allergic reaction to infection, the more often you swim or wade in contaminated water, the more likely you are to develop more serious symptoms. The greater the number of exposures to contaminated water, the more intense and immediate symptoms of swimmer's itch will be.

Be aware that swimmer's itch is not the only rash that may occur after swimming in fresh or salt water.

HOW IS SWIMMER'S ITCH DIAGNOSED?

Most cases of swimmer's itch do not require medical attention, but if you have a severely itchy rash your health care provider may suggest prescription-strength lotions or creams to lessen your symptoms.

HOW IS SWIMMER'S ITCH TREATED?

If you have a rash, you may try the following for relief:

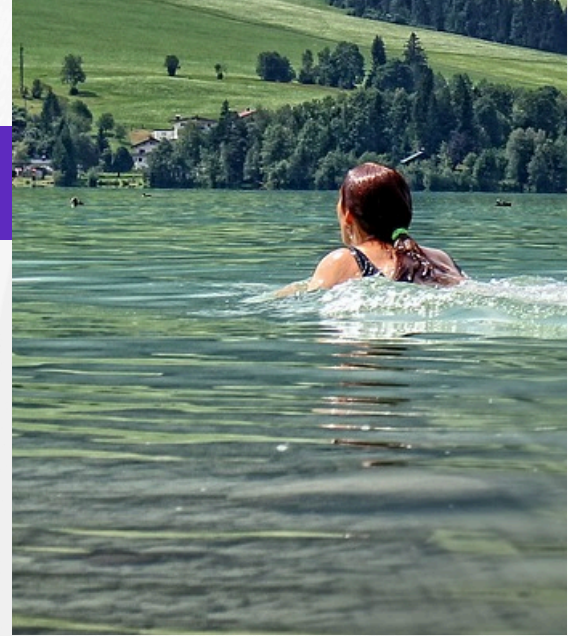
- Use corticosteroid cream
- Apply cool compresses to the affected areas
- Bathe in Epsom salts or baking soda
- Soak in colloidal oatmeal baths
- Apply baking soda paste to the rash (made by stirring water into baking soda until it reaches a paste-like consistency)
- Use an anti-itch lotion

Though difficult, try not to scratch. Scratching may cause the rash to become infected. If itching is severe, your health care provider may suggest prescription-strength lotions or creams to lessen your symptoms.

HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT SWIMMER'S ITCH?

To reduce the likelihood of developing swimmer's itch

- Do not swim in areas where swimmer's itch is a known problem or where signs have been posted warning of unsafe water.
- Do not swim near or wade in marshy areas where snails are commonly found.
- Towel dry or shower immediately after leaving the water as the act of toweling dry can smash/kill the larva on the skin that has not yet burrowed into the skin.
- Do not attract birds (e.g., by feeding them) to areas where people are swimming.
- Encourage health officials to post signs on shorelines where swimmer's itch is a current problem.



WHEN SHOULD I STAY HOME FROM WORK, SCHOOL, OR CHILDCARE?

YOU SHOULD NOT ATTEND WORK, SCHOOL, OR CHILDCARE IF ONE OF THE FOLLOWING APPLIES:

- You have a severely itching rash that is overly distracting.
- You do not feel well enough to participate in regular activities.