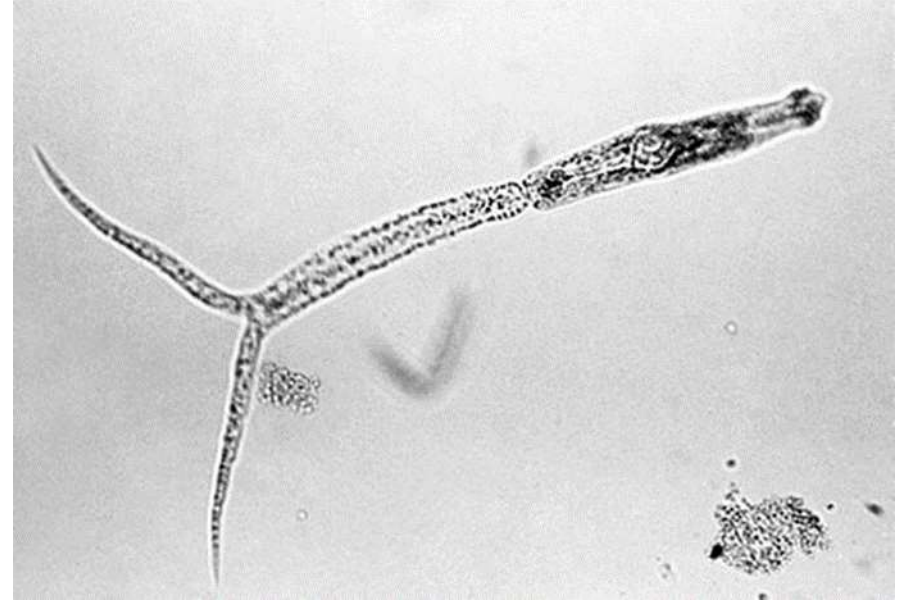


Swimmer's itch

What is it?

- An allergic reaction to a parasite in the water
- Temporary, non contagious, not dangerous, but can be very uncomfortable
- Some people may react more strongly than others to the parasites



Source: Mayo Clinic

Symptoms

- Red marks may appear on your skin shortly after getting out of the water;
- After several hours, these marks develop into red, itching or burning bite-like welts than can become the size of a ten cent coin;
- Intense itching that can last for up to ten days, but usually the symptoms disappear within 1-2 weeks;
- The red welts may turn into blisters or cause a rash, which in some cases may lead to a minor skin infection.

Swimmer's Itch

source: Wikipedia

mayo clinic.org

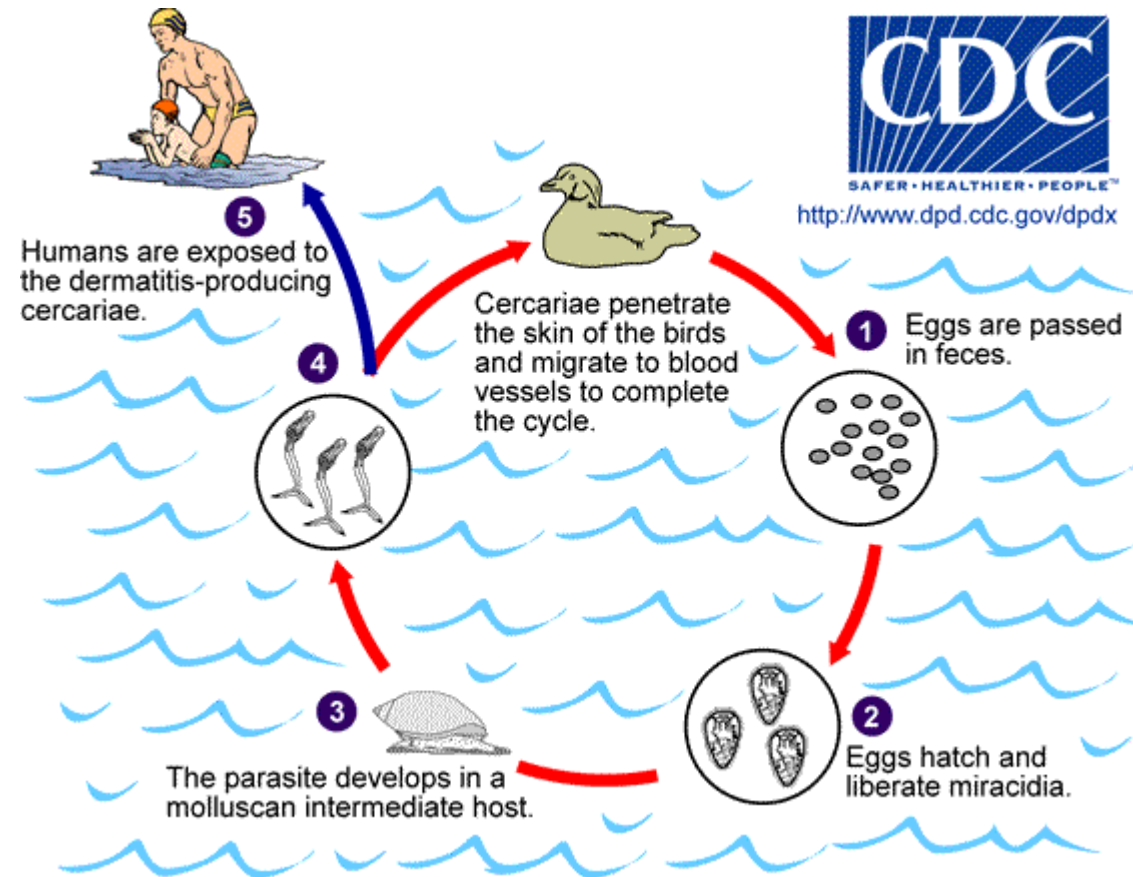


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What causes swimmer's itch?

- Several species of tiny, parasitic flatworms (schistosomes) can cause swimmer's itch
- The parasites live in birds, and sometimes small mammals (the primary hosts)
- The parasite's eggs (lots of them!) will be shed into the water via the bird's feces
- The eggs hatch into a microscopic larvae that can swim in the water (miracidia – a baby flatworm 😊)
- The larvae burrow into a snail's tissue (the secondary host) where they will develop for 3-4 weeks
- They emerge as another form of larvae (a cercaria) and swim off to find a new primary host (another bird)

The life cycle of the parasites that cause swimmer's itch



The larvae can't survive in humans

- These microscopic parasites may bump into humans and stick to your skin. They may then burrow into your skin. (Basically, they mistake you for birds!)
- Your body will defend itself against them, and they die
- However, the contact can cause skin irritation in some people
- Small children may be more susceptible

Can we get rid of the parasites in the lake?

- Nothing can be done to eliminate them from the water.
- Swimmer's itch is not caused by pollution in the water
- Like mosquitoes and black flies, this is something we have to learn to live with and still enjoy outdoor activities
- The best approach is to learn how to reduce exposure

What can increase the risk of getting swimmer's itch?

- Swimmer's itch parasites occur more frequently when the water is warmest. Their season is relatively short - usually four to six weeks, mostly in July, depending on the weather.
- The presence of birds can increase the risk of swimmer's itch. Avoid feeding geese or ducks!!

Prevention

- Don't remain in a wet bathing suit after getting out of the water
- The most important thing to do to prevent the itch is to rub down very briskly right after leaving the water. This can crush the organisms before they can penetrate the skin.
- Showering shortly after leaving the water also should help.
- Some people have noted that waterproof sunscreens and lotions reduce the infections.

Prevention

- If you decide to swim when and where swimmer's itch is known to be present:
 - Stay clear of plants growing in the lake. Swimming rather than playing or wading in shallow water will reduce exposure.
 - Swim further offshore if possible.
 - Avoid swimming when winds are likely to be carrying the organisms into the beach.

Treatment

- In most cases, swimmer's itch goes away on its own
- Anti-itch lotions such as calamine, or lotions containing antihistamines and/or local anesthetic can help soothe the symptoms
- You can also try cool wet cloths (compresses) on your skin.
- Add a handful of oatmeal (ground to a powder) or Epsom salts to your bath.
- Make a paste of baking soda and water, and then apply it to the affected skin.
- Try not to scratch the rash. This could lead to an infection.

For more information

- Check out the short pamphlet on the Québec website at
- https://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/Documents/SF_aff_infections_milieu_garde.pdf
- Or contact info-santé clsc

Good swimming!

