



BEWARE OF SWIMMER'S ITCH

July 10, 2019- Who doesn't love a good dip in the lake on a hot summer day? People and microscopic parasites, of course. These parasites are looking for a host to latch on to and if you're hanging out in the shallow area of a lake, pond, or ocean, you may become the host and experience swimmer's itch!

So, what's swimmer's itch? Swimmer's itch, also called cercarial dermatitis, appears as a skin rash caused by an allergic reaction to certain microscopic parasites. These parasites are released from infected snails into fresh and salt water (such as lakes, ponds, and oceans). While the parasite's preferred host is a specific bird or mammal, if the parasite meets a swimmer, it can burrow into their skin causing an allergic reaction and rash.

Common symptoms of swimmer's itch may include:

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

Because swimmer's itch is caused by an allergic reaction to parasites, 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.

Gross, we know, but District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) wants you to know that swimmer's itch is a real problem and several of our counties are experiencing this. So, we are here to remind everyone how to reduce the likelihood of developing "the itch" and provide some steps to take if you or someone you know experience this.

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.
- 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.

Most cases of swimmer's itch do not require medical attention. 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

To learn more about swimmer's itch visit [CDC – Swimmer's Itch FAQ](#) or [DHD#10 – Avoid Swimmer's Itch](#)



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