

## **If swimmers' Itch occurs in a lake, is the lake polluted?**

No, according to the Anchorage Health and Human Service Department, the opposite is probably true. Swimmers' itch is not a health hazard. It is more of a nuisance. Natural lake conditions promote the diversity of species, including snails and birds that are potential hosts for the causative agents of swimmers' itch.

## **What can you do to reduce the chances of getting swimmers' itch?**

- Towel off immediately after swimming or wading in infested water may help to prevent rash development.
- Swim in water away from the shore.
- Avoid swimming in areas where snails and birds have accumulated.
- Don't feed the birds.
- **Enjoy the beach, but wade into you local swimming pool for hours of fun and frolic. For swimming pool schedules and information call the pool fun line at 343-4402**

## **Is there other information available on swimmers' itch?**

- Yes, there are many published and on-line articles available on swimmers' itch.
- <http://www.hope.edu/swimmersitch>
- <http://www.calvin.edu/~cblankes/itch/>

## **Swimmer's Itch**

**How to prevent it, or survive with it if you get it.**



**Warning Children and adults entering Jewel Lake may suffer from swimmer's itch due to the high level of Schistosome parasite found in Jewel Lake.**

**Aquatic Phone Number  
343—4402**

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Municipality of Anchorage  
Parks and Recreation  
Aquatics

# SWIMMER'S ITCH

## What is Swimmers' Itch?

**Swimmers' itch is a skin rash caused by a parasite (called a Schistosome) that is often found in Alaska's lakes and ponds in the summer months.**

Swimmers' itch is a dermatitis that develops on parts of the body that have been exposed to lake water. Reddened spots, called papules, form on the body within hours after exposure and will itch intensely for several days before subsiding. After approximately 1 week, the symptoms usually disappear. In several cases, a person can develop a fever, become nauseated and spend several sleepless nights.

## What causes Swimmers' Itch?

A person gets swimmer itch when larval parasites (flatworms) burrow into the skin of a sensitive person swimming or wading in the water. Since the parasites cannot live inside the human body, they soon die causing an intense allergic reaction. Human penetration by the parasite is accidental, as flatworms ordinarily penetrate ducks, geese and seagulls. Although you are not able to see the parasite, the existence of birds in or around the water may indicate the existence of the parasite.

## Who gets Swimmer Itch?

Anyone who swims or wades in infested water may be at risk. The parasites are more likely to be present in shallow water by the shoreline. Children are most often infected due to their habits of swimming or wading in shallow water. Also children often do not towel dry themselves when leaving the water. **Swimmers' itch is not spread from person to person.**

## What are signs and symptoms of Swimmers' Itch?

Within minutes to days after swimming in contaminated water, you may experience tingling, burning, or itching of the skin. Small reddish pimples appear within 12 hours. Pimples may develop into small blisters. 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 swimmers' itch will be. Be aware, however, that there are other causes of rash that may occur after swimming in fresh or salt water.

## What is the treatment for Swimmers' Itch?

Most cases, according to the Alaska Department of Health and Human Services, do not require medical attention. If you have a rash, you may try the following for relief:

- Hydrocortisone 1% cream
- Cool compresses
- Bath with baking soda
- Apply baking soda paste to the rash
- Anti-itch lotion
- Calamine lotion
- Colloidal oatmeal baths, such as Aveeno.

**Do not scratch.** Scratching may cause the rash to become infected. If itching is severe, your health care provider may prescribe lotion or creams to lessen your symptoms.

## When can you get swimmers' itch?

The first outbreaks of swimmers' itch at Jewel Lake usually are reported at the end of June. It appears that it may last the entire summer.

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