

Swimmer's Itch

Some residents around the lakes in Val-des-Monts have suffered from this skin rash called swimmer's itch. The information below is provided by the Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux du Québec.

What is Swimmer's Itch?

Swimmer's itch is a skin rash caused by small larvae found in certain lakes. These larvae are called "cercariae". They are so tiny that it is hard to see them with the naked eye.

When you are out swimming or wading, cercariae can stick to your skin until you get out of the water. Out in the sunshine, the skin dries and the cercariae bite to penetrate your skin. They die afterwards.

How do you get Swimmer's Itch?

- Waterfowl are the hosts for the parasite that causes the presence of cercariae in the water you swim in.
- The cycle begins with bird feces that are the source of contamination for the snails along the shore.
- The cercariae emerge from the snails and return to contaminate the birds
- Unfortunately, the cercariae do not distinguish between birds and people. So people in the water get bitten by accident.

How does it affect your health?

Swimmer's itch can be unpleasant to those who have it:

- Soon after you leave the water, small red spots appear on your skin.
- These spots can appear on all the uncovered parts of your body exposed to the water.
- A few hours later, the red spots will swell up to resemble insect bites that can grow as big as a dime.
- Intense itchiness sets in and can last for more than 10 days, although it generally disappears after a week or two.
- Some people may suffer a minor skin infection.

How can swimmer's itch be prevented?

- If possible, stay away from beaches where cases of swimmer's itch have been reported.
- Spend no more than a few minutes in the water.
- When you leave the water, vigorously rub yourself dry with a towel. Do not let the water evaporate off your skin out in the sun.
- Let the other swimmers know if you have swimmer's itch
- **Do not feed waterfowl.**

How can you treat swimmer's itch?

- First of all, do not scratch or you may cause a skin infection.
- To relieve the itching, you can use a cream or lotion with calamine or talk to your pharmacist.
- If the itching continues more than a few days, or if you are worried about your health, contact your doctor immediately.

Is there anything else I should know?

- In spite of the rash and the itching, swimmer's itch is not a significant health problem.
- Swimmer's itch cannot be spread from one person to another.
- There is no relation between swimmer's itch and water pollution.
- You want to know more... contact Info-Santé CLSC in your region

Source: Government of Quebec, Ministry of Health and Social Services
www.msss.gouv.qc.ca