

SWIMMER'S ITCH INFORMATION

(Information obtained from Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council brochure)

It has been brought to our attention that "Swimmer's Itch" may be a problem in some area waterbodies. Outlined are some facts to help people understand this issue.

Swimmer's Itch has probably been around as long as human beings. It has been known to occur in at least 30 states as well as Canada, Europe, and the Orient. In the U.S., it appears to be concentrated in the Midwest region.

Swimmer's Itch is a skin irritation caused by a larval form of a certain type of Flatworm (parasite) with a complex life cycle and involves certain species of snails and waterfowl with a larvae that burrows into human skin seeking to complete their life cycle. This life cycle includes two very specific hosts; one certain species of snail and one kind of waterfowl and BOTH must be present in the same lake for completion of this cycle. Since humans are NOT the proper host, the larvae soon die causing an itching sensation from an allergic reaction developed from the dead larvae under the skin.

Not all people exposed are sensitive to Swimmer's Itch. Those who are sensitive may feel a dull prickly sensation as the larvae burrow into the skin while either swimming or immediately after leaving the water. At each point of entry, a small red spot may appear and begin to itch and can persist for several days.

There are few methods of control when it comes to Swimmer's Itch. Under a permit from the Dept. of Environmental Quality, Copper Sulfate can be applied to the locations of the specific type of snails and their existing beds at high rates. This method of control is not always feasible or cost effective as re-infestations often occur from the movement of larvae with water movement from the wind.

You can significantly reduce your risk of contracting the Swimmer's Itch parasite by several means:

Since itch-causing larvae usually live in the shallow areas near shore, it is best to avoid this area as much as possible; especially when the wind is blowing toward your swimming area. Towel off VIGOROUSLY and THOROUGHLY as soon as you leave the water as the fragile larvae can sometimes be rubbed off before they fully penetrate the skin. **DO NOT FEED THE WATERFOWL!!** This may draw or concentrate the potential hosts in a limited area.

If you think you or a family member may have contracted Swimmer's Itch, ask your doctor or pharmacist for the best treatment available to help reduce the itching sensation.