

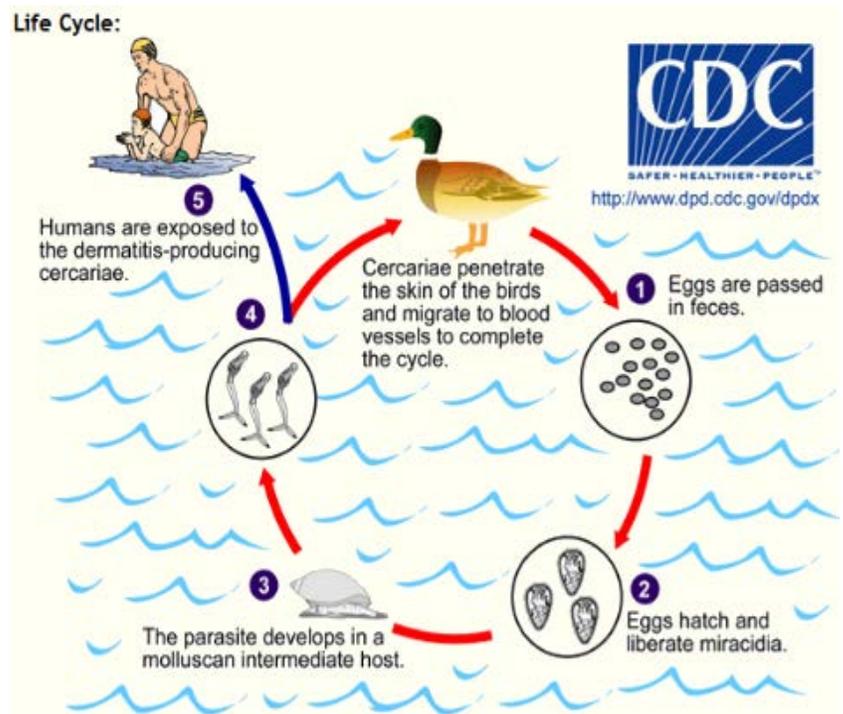
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SWIMMER'S ITCH

NOTE: It has been reported to the California Department of Water Resources that some Pyramid Lake swimmers have complained of "Swimmer's Itch." Below is some helpful information.

What is swimmer's itch?

Swimmer's itch, also known as cercarial dermatitis, is an irritating, yet harmless rash caused by the human body's reaction to a microscopic parasite found in shallow water.

The adult parasite lives inside water birds, such as ducks and geese. The parasite produces eggs that are passed through the bird's digestive system and excreted into the water. The eggs hatch into larvae, which move into water snails and grow. After incubating in the snails, the parasite moves out of the snails and swims in search of water birds to start the cycle over again. It is during this time that the parasite can contact humans. It burrows under the skin and dies because humans are not suitable hosts. This may irritate the skin and can cause a rash.



Can swimmer's itch be controlled in the lake?

The swimmer's itch parasite is very difficult to control in a natural setting without harming fish and other organisms. The host snails can be killed with high doses of copper sulfate. A large area would have to be treated with the pesticide to make sure most of the snails were killed. Treating a large area with a high concentration of copper sulfate could cause a fish kill. The addition of copper sulfate could also present a water quality concern as Pyramid Lake is a source of water for Southern California.

A more environmentally-friendly herbicide was recently used at Pyramid Lake to control aquatic weeds growing in and around the swim areas. Eliminating the weed beds and the snail habitat may help reduce the swimmer's itch parasite.

Who may develop swimmer's itch?

Anyone who swims or wades in water containing the parasite may be at risk. Most people who come in contact with the parasite will not develop swimmer's itch. Children are more likely to develop swimmer's itch because they tend to spend time in shallow water and they are less likely to towel dry themselves after leaving the water.

Continued on the other side

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SWIMMER'S ITCH

Where are swimmers likely to develop swimmer's itch?

The parasite can be found in fresh water, such as lakes and ponds, and salt water, such as the ocean. Swimmer's itch occurs throughout the world. The parasite is more likely to be present in shallow water by the shoreline, and in areas where water birds and aquatic snails are present.

When are swimmers most likely to develop swimmer's itch?

The swimmer's itch parasite is most common during the summer months, when water temperatures are warm. With California's fourth year of drought conditions, little water is flowing into Pyramid Lake. This lack of water movement may have created ideal conditions for swimmer's itch through increased water temperatures and aquatic weed growth which provides habitat for snails.

Symptoms

- Tingling, burning or itching of the skin, small reddish pimples, or small blisters.
- Symptoms may occur within minutes to days after exposure. Small reddish pimples appear within about 12 hours. Pimples may develop into small blisters. Itching may occur for several days, but all symptoms usually disappear within a week.

Measures to reduce itching

Most cases of swimmer's itch do not require medical attention. Avoid scratching the rash, as it may cause infection. If you have a rash, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends trying the following for relief:

- corticosteroid cream
- anti-itch lotion
- apply cool compresses
- bathe in Epsom salts or baking soda
- soak in colloidal oatmeal baths
- apply baking soda paste to rash (mix baking soda with water until it reaches paste-like consistency)

If symptoms persist, consult your physician.

Prevention

To reduce the risk of developing swimmer's itch:

- Briskly towel off immediately upon leaving the water to remove the parasites from your skin.
- Swim for short periods of time (10 minutes or less).
- Do not swim in areas frequented by large numbers of ducks or geese.
- Avoid swimming near aquatic weeds or snails.
- Do not feed ducks or geese near swimming areas. Increased numbers of water birds in an area can result in increased swimmer's itch problems.