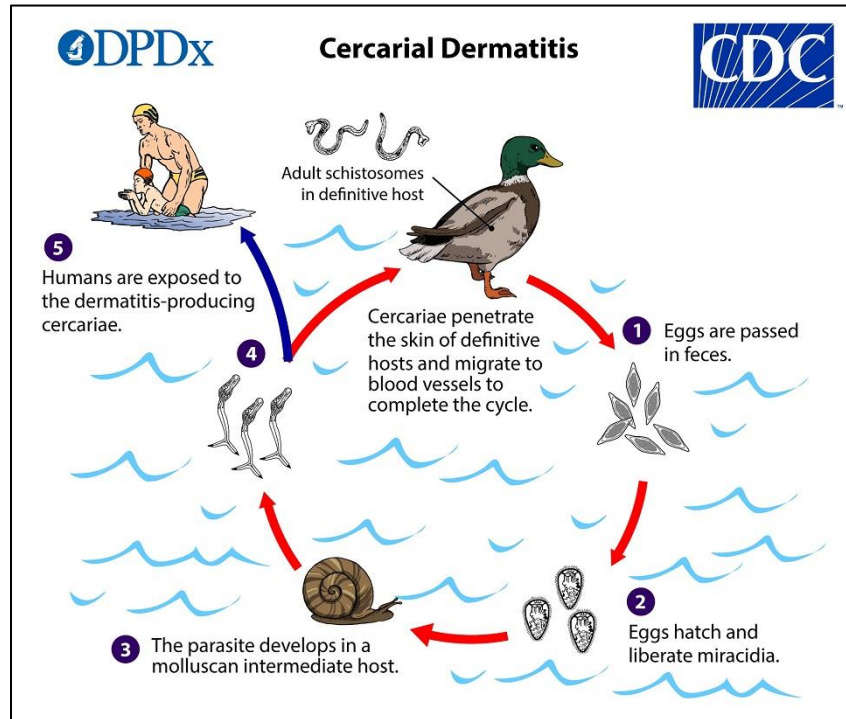


## Swimmer's Itch (Cercarial Dermatitis, Schistosomiasis)

Swimmer's itch is a skin rash caused by a parasite (*schistosomes*) that is released from infected snails into shallow water. Once released, the parasites can penetrate the skin of people in the water. A visual of the life cycle is shown below:



Life cycle image courtesy of [CDC - Cercarial Dermatitis - Biology](#)

## Transmission

While all age groups are at risk, children are most often infected due to:

- **Swimming or wading in contaminated water**, followed by:
- **Not promptly toweling off**

Only about one-third of people who are exposed to the parasite develop swimmer's itch.

## Symptoms

Symptoms may appear within one to two hours of exposure and may include:

- **Tingling sensation** as the parasite digs into the skin
- **Small reddish pimples or blisters** may appear within 12 hours
- **Itching** may last up to a week or more but will gradually go away

A person's first exposure to infested water may not result in an itchy rash. Repeated exposure increases a person's allergic sensitivity to the parasite and increases the likelihood of rash development.

## Diagnosis

Most cases of swimmer's itch do not require medical attention. Laboratory tests are available to diagnose swimmer's itch if needed.

## Prevention

To reduce the likelihood of developing swimmer's itch:

- **Do not swim in areas where swimmer's itch is a known problem.**
- **Do not swim near or wade in marshy areas where snails** are commonly found.
- **Briskly towel dry or shower** immediately after leaving the water.
- **Do not attract birds** (e.g., feeding them) to areas where people are swimming.
- **Encourage health officials to post signs on shorelines** where swimmer's itch is a current problem.

## Treatment

Swimmer's itch does not have a specific medical treatment. 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**

Try not to scratch, as scratching may cause the rash to become infected. If itching is severe, your health care provider may suggest prescription-strength lotions or creams to lessen your symptoms.

For more information about the treatment of swimmer's itch contact your health care provider or visit [CDC - Cercarial Dermatitis](#).

## Exclusion Guidance

**Individuals with swimmer's itch should not be excluded from work, school, or child care** unless the [general exclusions apply](#).

For additional information about swimmer's itch, contact North Dakota Health and Human Services' Division of Public Health at 800.427.2180.

### Resources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, September 2). *Parasites - Cercarial Dermatitis*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved May 16, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/swimmersitch/index.html>.
2. Kimberlin, D. W., Barnett, E. D., Lynfield, R., Sawyer, M. H. (2021) Red Book: 2021-2024 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. 32nd ed. American Academy of Pediatrics. [Management and Prevention of Infectious Diseases; Schistosomiasis] [pages 122-133; 666-668].