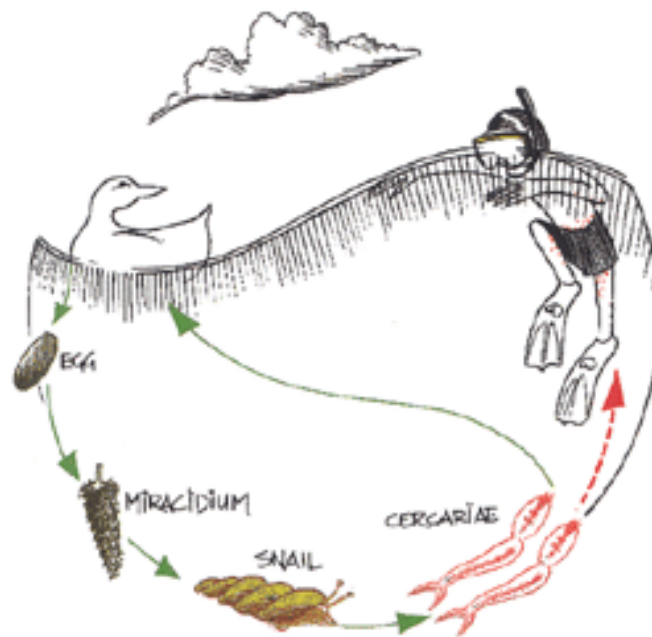


SWIMMER'S ITCH FACT SHEET

Swimmer's Itch (Schistosome Cercarial Dermatitis) is caused by a tiny larval flatworm entering human skin. The flatworm is unable to infect a human; it is seeking a water bird. Shortly after entering a human's skin, the flatworm dies. In some people an allergic reaction follows penetration into the skin. Entry can be felt as a dull, prickly, and itchy sensation. In sensitized individuals a small, reddened area will develop at the site of entry. Intermittent periods of itching will continue for several days. After about 24 hours, the reddened areas reach their largest size. After a week, the reddened areas usually disappear; leaving a spot that resembles a small bruise.



TO AVOID SWIMMER'S ITCH:

Towel down right after leaving the water to help remove the parasite.

Avoid areas with lots of plants or submerged cement.

Wind can concentrate parasites in shallow beach areas.

Continuous swimming along the shore should be avoided. The flatworm may float to the surface of the water and drift with the wind to accumulate along the shore. Winds in Michigan are often westerly or northerly so generally people contact the parasites on eastern and southern shores. Children who continually go in and out of the shallow water can get a heavy case.

For more information, visit www.swimmersitch.org. Graphic from www.gov.mb.ca

Public Health – Muskegon County