



Clam Digger's/Swimmer's Itch (Schistosome Dermatitis)

What is Clam Digger's/Swimmer's Itch?

Clam Digger's Itch and /Swimmer's Itch are skin rashes caused by certain parasites of birds and mammals. These parasites are released from infected snails and migrate through waters including those used for recreational swimming. Clam Digger's Itch is associated with salt water, while Swimmer's Itch is associated with fresh water. Both occur during the summer and may be more common during periods of especially hot weather.

How is Clam Digger's/Swimmer's Itch Spread?

A person may get the skin rash by swimming or wading in infested water and then allowing water on the skin to air dry instead of drying off with a towel. It is not transmitted from person-to-person.

Who gets Clam Digger's/Swimmer's Itch?

People who swim or wade in water infested with the parasite may experience this itching rash. All age groups and both sexes can be involved. Children are most often affected due to their habits of swimming or wading in the water and then playing on the beach as the water evaporates from their skin.

What are the Symptoms of Clam Digger's/Swimmer's Itch?

When water infested with the parasite is allowed to air dry on your skin, an initial tingling sensation may be felt when the parasite enters the skin. A mild itching may occur within one to two hours after exposure and last for around an hour. The itching will subside for 10-15 hours and then become extremely intense.

A person's first exposure to infested water may not result in the itchy rash. Repeated exposures increase a person's sensitivity to the parasite and increase the likelihood of getting a rash.

What is the Treatment for Clam Digger's/Swimmer's Itch?

While all cases do not require treatment, some people may seek relief by applying specific skin lotions or creams to minimize the itching.

What can be done to Prevent Clam Digger's/Swimmer's Itch?

Toweling off vigorously after swimming or wading can be very helpful in preventing rash development. Do not air dry.

Cases of Clam Digger's/Swimmer's Itch should be reported to the Stratford Health Department (203-385-4090) or the lifeguard on duty.

This fact sheet is for information only. It is not intended to for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you have any questions about the condition described above or think you may have this infection, consult your health care provider.

