

Schistosome

Dermatitis:

'Swimmer's Itch'

There have been reports to the Environmental Health Section of the Division of Public Health and Social Services, in recent weeks a large number of cases of Schistosome Dermatitis.

Schistosome Dermatitis is more commonly known as 'swimmer's itch'. It is a skin eruption caused when free swimming larvae attach themselves to the swimmer's skin and burrow into it upon emergence from the water. They then die and cause irritation and itching about 4 hours later.

The schistosome or larvae are put into the water by a warm-blooded host (bird or animal) and multiply in snails which live in the water. In the Fairbanks area, abandoned borrow or gravel pits are the primary areas where these conditions occur.

The Environmental Health Section cannot recommend swimming in these areas because of possible bacterial contamination and safety factors (glass, abandoned metal parts, no lifeguard).

However, to anyone who swims in ponds or abandoned gravel pits, it is recommended that they vigorously towel themselves immediately upon leaving the water.

This will remove all or most of any schistosomes from the skin before they burrow in.

If any skin rash has developed after swimming, it is recommended that your local physician be contacted.