

The scratch on swimmer's itch

Swimming is one of the most popular activities on Lake Windermere. Whether you use one of the many private beaches along the lake or a public beach, swimmer's itch can affect you.

Swimmer's Itch is caused by a parasite that lives in many of our lakes in B.C. and across North America. It makes its home in snails and waterfowl. When it leaves a snail and is looking for a new home, it can sometimes mistake swimmers for waterfowl. When a swimmer comes out of the water, these microscopic parasites may be in the film of water on their skin and as the water dries, the parasite will try to burrow into the skin. This causes an allergic reaction, which results in itchiness or a rash.

"The parasite is harmless and cannot live in humans, but the itchy rash it can cause is annoying, and if scratching breaks the skin, an infection can occur as with any break in the skin," says Ken Christian, Director of Health Protection for Interior Health. "While it can be commonly found in any lake or pond, there are a few simple steps you can take to prevent swimmer's itch."

- After swimming, shower immediately.
- If a shower is not possible, towel off briskly.
- Swimmer's itch larvae hang out near the shore so swimming off a dock may help.
- If the itch is still present after leaving the beach try a shallow bath in luke-warm water with about three tablespoons of baking soda and apply a cool compress.

The Lake Windermere Project's 2005 Lake-Use Survey found that most respondents use Kinsmen Beach for swimming and relaxing. According to Brian Nickuark, director of municipal works, the District of Invermere is currently redesigning the shower at Kinsmen Beach and construction will take place this month.

For further information please contact the Lake Windermere Project at 341-6898. You can also visit the Project office located in the old District of Invermere office beside the Invermere Community Centre. The Lake Windermere Project is a long-term comprehensive stewardship program dedicated to safeguarding the health of our lake. The Lake Windermere Project is made possible by generous financial support from Environment Canada, Columbia Basin Trust and the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. Information provided by Interior Health Authority.