WHAT IS SWIMMER’S ITCH?
Swimmer’s Itch, also called cercarial dermatitis, is an irritation of the skin caused by the larvae of certain parasites (Family Schistosomidae) that affect aquatic life and waterfowl.

They do not parasitize humans, but do burrow into human skin trying to complete their life cycle. The larvae die shortly after entering the skin causing an allergic reaction that is “the itch”.

Swimmer’s Itch is fairly common in many of the pristine lakes in our area of Northern Michigan. It also occurs in at least 30 other states as well as Canada, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

SYMPTOMS
Reactions to Swimmer’s Itch vary widely. Some individuals are not noticeably affected while others develop allergic reactions that can be mild to severe. Young children and people with fair skin may be more susceptible than others.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?
* Avoid swimming in shallow water near shore where swimmer’s itch is most common.
* Use a Swimmer’s Itch cream or waterproof sunscreen with 15 SPF or greater before entering the water.
* Shower or towel dry rubbing vigorously after leaving the water.
* Do not attract waterfowl to swimming areas.
* Help educate others on the issue.
* Volunteer to help the Avoidance Program.

TREATMENT
Do not scratch as this can cause the rash to become more irritated or infected.
* Use corticosteroid cream.
* Apply cool compresses to affected areas.
* Bathe in Epsom salts or baking soda.
* Soak in colloidal oatmeal baths.
* Apply baking soda paste.
* Use an anti-itch lotion.

If itching is severe a health care provider may prescribe lotions or creams to lessen symptoms.

WHO TO CONTACT...
For additional information, to volunteer or to report sightings of Common Mergansers or locations near the lake or along the Cut River that these birds are known or suspected to be nesting, please contact:

Frank Homola
Supervisor Gerrish Township
supervisor@gerrishtownship.org

or

Ed Nellist
Supervisor Lyon Township
supervisor@lyontownship.org
How is it transmitted?

Once it’s in the duck, it easily moves around the lake, and ultimately along the shoreline.

Swimmer’s itch starts out as an egg in intestinal lining of waterfowl, mostly ducks.

Eggs are released into the water and hatch into “miricidia” that enter snails.

Snails then release “cercaria” that swim in search of waterfowl, to complete the cycle.

The cercaria typically inhabits shallow water which facilitates coming into contact with a duck (its definitive host).

The cercaria causes swimmer’s itch in humans by burrowing into the skin where they quickly die.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Gerrish and Lyon Townships, the County of Roscommon and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources with support from the Higgins Lake Foundation, Higgins Lake Environmental and Economic Coalition and Higgins Lake Property Owners Association are working to find solutions.

Gerrish and Lyon Townships established a Swimmer’s Itch Task Force in 2013 to gather and share information, consider options and implement measures to mitigate the impact of Swimmer’s Itch. This spring an “Avoidance Program” will be implemented to scare these ducks off the lake and discourage nesting.

WATERFOWL IDENTIFICATION

Not all waterfowl transmit Swimmer’s Itch. It is occasionally found in Mallards but is not carried by these other waterfowl that use Higgins Lake.

MALLARD
(Anas platyrhynchos)

HOODED MERGANSER
(Lophodytes cucullatus)

WOOD DUCK
(Aix sponsa)

COMMON LOON
(Gavia immer)