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Media Release

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POSSIBLE CASES OF SWIMMER'S ITCH REPORTED IN COLUMBIA RIVER

Health Officials Advise Precautions to Avoid Parasite Exposure

July 21, 2025

KENNEWICK, Wash. – Benton-Franklin Health District (BFHD) is advising community members that swimmer's itch—an itchy skin rash caused by a microscopic parasite—has likely been detected in parts of the Columbia River. Several individuals have reported symptoms after recent water exposure, consistent with swimmer's itch.

Swimmer's itch, also known as cercarial dermatitis, occurs when certain parasites, released from infected snails, come into contact with human skin in freshwater or saltwater environments. While the parasite typically infects birds and mammals, it can mistakenly burrow into human skin, triggering an allergic reaction.

"This condition isn't contagious and usually goes away on its own, but it can be very uncomfortable," said Dr. Steve Krager, Health Officer at BFHD. "We want people to be aware and take a few simple precautions to reduce their risk while enjoying the water."

Common symptoms include tingling, burning, or itching of the skin, followed by a red rash or small blisters. Although swimmer's itch does not lead to long-term health issues, excessive scratching may result in secondary infections.

To reduce your risk of swimmer's itch:

- Avoid swimming in areas where swimmer's itch has been reported or signs are posted.
- Stay away from marshy shorelines where snails are often present.
- Dry off with a towel or shower immediately after swimming.
- Apply waterproof sunscreen before swimming, which may act as a barrier.
- Do not feed birds near swimming areas, as they are part of the parasite's life cycle.
- Swimmer's itch is more common in the summer and can occur in water bodies worldwide. BFHD encourages residents to enjoy the outdoors while staying informed and cautious.

For more information, visit the CDC's page on cercarial dermatitis: [About Swimmer's Itch | Swimmer's Itch \(Cercarial Dermatitis\) | CDC](#)

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