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SEA BATHER'S ITCH

A skin irritation resembling "Sea Bather's Itch" has been recently reported by a number of swimmers in Greenwich coastal waters. Sea Bather's Itch is characterized by itchy welts resembling mosquito bites that usually appear about a day or two after swimming in affected areas, and lasts from seven to ten days. The rash occurs primarily on parts of the swimmer's body covered by a bathing suit. The annoying and painful, but otherwise harmless rash, occurs sporadically and sometimes in epidemics. The condition, although irritating, is neither serious nor contagious.

Sea Bather's Itch is caused by a tiny parasite of the Schistosome group, which normally alternates its life cycle between snails and waterfowl. A larval form of the parasite is shed by infected snails and may burrow into the skin of humans, causing characteristic itching and raised skin eruptions.

Bathers in all swimming areas are urged not to spend long periods of time in the water. The best remedy is to remove the bathing suit, which traps the larvae, shower and then towel dry. Prolonged wearing of a contaminated bathing suit will increase your risk.

Recommended first aid includes over-the-counter preparations of antihistamines (lotion or tablets). Severe cases should be referred to a physician, particularly if welts become infected.

It is difficult to predict when Sea Bather's Itch parasites will be present at beaches and virtually impossible to eliminate them from the water.