

Lake Rashes (Especially Swimmer's Itch)

Our lakes appear to be in a generally healthy condition, and are monitored on a regular basis.

From time to time, we receive reports from residents that after swimming at the lake, they develop a lake rash or swimmer's itch which appears as bites or a rash.

Recommendations after swimming, wading, or wetting feet at the beaches

- 1. Towel off thoroughly as soon as you leave the water and at frequent intervals**
- 2. Rinse off with fresh water, and thoroughly towel dry, to remove any irritating agents. Water hoses and/or outdoor showerheads are available at the Foxview and Chatham beach houses**
- 3. Apply waterproof sunscreen which may help to reduce the ability of irritating agents from penetrating the skin.**

Aquatic plants and algae in our lakes are increased by runoff from the surrounding watershed and directly from nutrients on our lawns/properties. Also, some parasites are released by waterfowl and mammals into the environment. Run-off typically carries high nutrient concentrations from fertilizers, rich soils, and waterfowl and mammal wastes directly into the lakes. Elevated levels of contaminants and nutrients and warm water temperatures create conditions favorable for parasite, weed, and algae growth. Certain types of growth can cause lake rashes.

Two likely causes for lake rashes

1. Swimmers itch – the most common cause of lake rash. It is caused by a parasite, a naturally occurring lake condition which has been controlled in the past with spot treatments of an aquatic pesticide at the beaches. The parasites can develop rapidly and it's very possible that they could rebound between treatments. Again, there is ongoing monitoring and treatment given the size of the lakes (maximum treatment frequency is every 14 days).

Swimmer's itch is caused by a natural cycle between waterfowl and some mammals and lake snails that can't be completely prevented or eliminated.

Swimmer's itch, also known as cercarial dermatitis, is a skin rash caused by an allergic reaction to microscopic parasites that can be found in lakes. These parasites infect waterfowl, some mammals, and snails. The parasite larvae leave the snails and swim near the water's surface, mostly in shallow water by the shoreline. When people swim, wade, and wet their feet in lakes, the parasites can get under the skin and cause an allergic reaction.

The rash and itch are mostly just irritating, especially for younger children. Normally there is no serious risk because the parasite cannot enter the blood and the rash does not spread from the initial points of contact. The infection is also self-limiting, which means it will usually clear up on its own in time.

2. Algae rash – this often occurs as the result of fertilizer runoff into the lakes (directly or through the storm water drains) leading to algae-like bloom, including Cyanobacterial (blue-green algae), which can irritate the skin. Lake itch caused by algae is rare. Similar in appearance to swimmer's itch.

We do have an annual problem with the runoff of nutrients into our lakes. This promotes weeds, algae, and lower water oxygen. Lake nutrients are naturally occurring, but greatly increased by the use of fertilizers which are harmful to the lakes.

Please remember that even if you don't live along a lake, our storm water drains directly into the lakes.

How to help reduce harmful contaminants and nutrients in the lakes

Waterfowl

The number one strategy for waterfowl control and management of unwanted dangers (infected droppings): Do not feed waterfowl, especially geese and ducks.

Additionally, lakefront homes can help prevent geese and ducks from making their homes lakeside by maintaining a buffer zone of unmanaged (unfertilized) grasses or natural vegetation around the shoreline as noted in the Sturbridge Lakes Handbook.

<http://www.sturbridgelakes.com/handbook/slresmanual.htm>

Fertilizers

While many factors play into our lakes' health, it is known that the lakes are negatively impacted by the overuse of fertilizers. The SLA would like to remind everyone that there are reasons behind restricting the amount of lawns permitted on each property. Less lawns mean less fertilizers. This in turn leads to healthier lakes and ecosystems.

Again, fertilizer runoff goes directly the lakes from shorefront properties and through the storm water drains from all properties. Limiting fertilizers is an important step toward keeping the lake waters healthy. See the Lawn Care Guidelines link below for additional information.

Additionally, dumping of any materials into the lakes, (sand, soil, leaves, grass clippings, etc.) is strictly prohibited. It's crucial we all be good stewards of our environment.

The SLA works closely with our lake management company, and will keep you informed of any developments. The lakes, including areas near the beaches, are treated seasonally when needed (no more than every two weeks) with an appropriate aquatic pesticide (products that are specifically formulated for use in water to control or kill aquatic plants, algae, certain parasites). When any of the lakes are treated, signs are posted near the affected lake entrance. Sign information would include treatment date, treatment, amount of time for no swimming after treatment (if necessary).

Reminder about dogs in the lakes

Some residents have asked if the lakes are safe for their dogs, especially in light of the swimmer's itch, and after lake treatments. We remind residents that their dogs are not permitted at the beaches and should not be swimming in the lakes. We cannot know if any lake conditions or lake treatments are safe for pets, as this is not the focus of any testing. It is best that dogs be kept out of the lakes.

Never drink lake water.

-SLA Board of Trustees

[Lawn Care Guidelines](#)