

# HEALTH NOTICE

**Swimmer's itch** (Schistosomes) and leeches are found in the majority of Alaskan waters and are occasionally encountered in Tanana Lakes. Neither one is considered a health threat to most individuals, however, either one has the potential to make you very uncomfortable. Detailed information on Swimmer's Itch can be found at the Center for Disease Control webpage <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/swimmersitch/>.

Swimmer's itch is predominantly found in still waters, like lakes and gravel pits, where water temperatures are warm enough to allow the organisms to survive. At Tanana Lakes, these conditions generally exist for a short period of time late in the summer (end of July to mid August) depending on the prevailing weather trends. The symptoms of swimmer's itch include a skin rash and mild to severe itching which can last from a few hours to a couple of days. Several things can be done to decrease the chances of getting swimmer's itch. Avoid lying in the warm shallow water on the edge of the lake. Rinse yourself off with fresh water after swimming and/or vigorously towel dry as soon as possible after getting out of the lake. If you do get swimmer's itch, skin cream designed to relieve itching may help.

Finding a leech attached to yourself can be an unpleasant experience, but don't panic. Avoid the temptation to just pull the leech off because part of their sucker may stay attached to you and can become infected. The preferred technique is to apply alcohol or heat to the leech and they will release themselves.

Being aware of how to handle these potential problems will help you enjoy your recreation in all Alaskan waters. We hope you enjoy Tanana Lakes and if you have any questions, please feel free to ask any park ranger for more information.

