



## Disease Spotlight: SCHISTOSOMIASIS



### What is schistosomiasis?

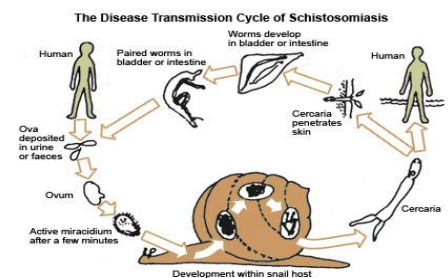
Schistosomiasis (aka bilharzia) is a disease caused by **parasitic worms**. Infection with *Schistosoma mansoni*, *S. haematobium*, and *S. japonicum* causes illness in humans. Although schistosomiasis is **not found in the US**, approximately 200 million people are infected worldwide.

### What are the symptoms of schistosomiasis?

Symptoms of the early stage of infection begin within days of exposure, and include a **rash or itchy skin, fever, chills, cough and muscle aches**. As the infection progresses, eggs pass to the liver or intestines and cause scarring and inflammation. After years of infection, the parasite **can also damage the liver, intestines, bladder, and lungs**. These symptoms are caused by the body's reaction to the worm eggs, not by the worms themselves.

### How does a person get schistosomiasis?

**Freshwater** becomes contaminated by *Schistosoma* eggs when **infected persons urinate or defecate in the water**. The eggs hatch, then grow and **develop inside snails** living in the water. The parasite leaves the snail and can survive in the water for up to 48 hours. Infection occurs when ***Schistosoma* parasites penetrate the skin of persons wading or swimming** in the water, then mature and produce eggs inside the bloodstream of the human host.



### How is schistosomiasis treated?

Safe and effective drugs are available for the treatment of schistosomiasis. One to two doses of the drug **praziquantel** is normally given in pill form.

### What can a traveler do to reduce the risk of schistosomiasis?

Schistosomiasis **occurs in almost all developing areas of the world**, including sub-Saharan Africa, South America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Travelers should:

- **Avoid swimming and wading in freshwater** in countries where schistosomiasis is known to occur.
- Drink only water that has been **boiled for at least 1 minute or filtered**. Iodine treatment alone **CANNOT** guarantee that water is safe and free of all parasites.
- Bath water should be heated for at least **5 minutes at 150°F**, and shower water should be **stored for 48 hours** before use.
- Vigorous towel drying after a brief, accidental exposure to fresh water may help prevent the parasite from penetrating the skin.

Source:

For more information on schistosomiasis, visit

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/schistosomiasis/factsht\\_schistosomiasis.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/schistosomiasis/factsht_schistosomiasis.htm)