The Life Cycle of Swimmer’s Itch

Here is the cycle that leads a parasite to enter the skin of vulnerable lake swimmers, causing a painful itch.

**Waterfowl Host**

- Flatworms become adult worms in veins that surround the intestines of certain birds and rodents. (Final Host Stage)

- Female worms lay eggs that enter intestines and hatch when released into water through feces.

- Eggs hatch into a free-swimming aquatic stage (miracidia) that enter snails. They elongate into germinating sacs that produce thousands of new parasites called cercaria. (Intermediate Host Stage)

- Cercaria burrow out of the snail and swim in search of a host. Rather than penetrate birds and rodents, repeating the cycle, the cercaria may encounter swimmers, penetrate their skin and die, causing swimmer’s itch.

**Humans**

**Snail Host**

- Larval Schistosome Flatworm (Cercaria)

**Egg**

- Larval Schistosome Flatworm (Miracidia)

**Adult Schistosome Flatworm**

Note: Drawings not to scale