

Schistosomiasis

What is schistosomiasis?

Schistosomiasis is a disease that occurs in humans if they have been infected by one of three different species of parasitic flatworms. A mild infection may show no symptoms, while a heavier infestation may result in a range of medical problems and damage to the body's internal organs.

Schistosomiasis is found in freshwater rivers and lakes in various parts of the world, including:

- Africa (southern and sub-Saharan areas and Lake Malawi)
- Egypt (the Nile River Valley)
- Latin America (Brazil, Venezuela, Antigua, Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, and Suriname)
- The Caribbean (Martinique, Montserrat, Puerto Rico, St. Lucia)
- The Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen)
- Southeast Asia (Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Japan, Central Indonesia, Mekong delta)
- Southern China

What are the sign and symptoms of schistosomiasis?

A prickly rash may develop within hours or days of becoming infected. Two to three weeks later, there may be fever, fatigue, weight loss, abdominal pain and swelling, headache and muscle aches. Heavy infections may last for years and damage tissue in the liver, lungs, bladder, bowels and nervous system.

How is schistosomiasis spread?

People become infected when they swallow or are exposed to fresh water in regions where this disease exists. The worms enter a person's skin and grow in the blood vessels, where they eventually produce eggs. The eggs travel within the bloodstream and cause inflammation and tissue damage within the body, usually to the liver, bladder and intestines.

How is schistosomiasis prevented?

- Avoid wading or swimming in fresh water in areas of the world where this disease exists
- Drink only water that is bottled or boiled for at least one minute
- Ensure bath water is heated to at least 150°F for at least five minutes, or held in a storage tank for at least 48 hours

What is the treatment for schistosomiasis?

Schistosomiasis can be effectively treated with oral medication.

For further information, please call:

York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653

TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca

