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For Immediate Release

MEDIA AVAILABILITY: 2 pm – 4 pm: Please call to schedule interview

Contact: Jeanene Fowler, 602-722-1806

Swimmer's Itch Reported in Maricopa County Lake

PHOENIX (May 30, 2013) – Several cases of swimmer's itch (also known as cercarial dermatitis and lake itch) have been reported in persons wading or swimming in Saguaro Lake.

Swimmer's itch is a rash caused by a tiny bird parasite that can occur in natural bodies of water and have been reported in lakes throughout Arizona. People can be exposed when swimming or wading in the shallow, marshy parts of the water. Symptoms consist of itchy reddish pimples and/or blisters that occur only on portions of skin that are submerged in water and can persist for a few days up to a few weeks. The rash goes away without treatment and symptoms are most commonly treated with topical creams or lotions. The rash is not spread from person to person.

“There are risks when swimming in natural bodies of water and swimmer's itch is one of those small risks. It is an allergic skin reaction to organisms present in affected bodies of water,” said Dr. Bob England, director of Maricopa County Department of Public Health. “Not everyone who visits a lake or even wades in shallow water will be exposed to this. Maricopa County Public Health is absolutely not advising people to avoid swimming in lakes.”

Although the rash was identified in visitors to Saguaro Lake, other lakes may be affected as well. To reduce the chance of exposure to swimmer's itch, avoid swimming in shallow water where submerged vegetation occurs and avoid marshy areas. All areas of the lake are not typically affected.

Most cases of swimmers itch will not require medical attention. If severe itching occurs, a healthcare provider may provide prescription strength topical cream to reduce the itching. When talking with a healthcare provider, it is important to discuss recent outdoor activities.

For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/parasites/swimmersitch/.

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