

Schistosomiasis (Bilharzia)



Distribution

Common in tropical and subtropical regions. At least 206 million people required treatment for schistosomiasis in 2016 (WHO, 2017).



Cause

Contact with water containing blood flukes (worms) belonging to the *Schistosoma* genus.

These parasites develop inside freshwater snails, and then emerge and enter water sources.

Schistosoma larvae infect people by entering through their skin while they are working or bathing in contaminated water.



Scanning electron micrograph of a pair of *Schistosoma mansoni* (public domain). Adults can grow to over 1 cm long.



Symptoms

After worms have matured in a person's body, they produce eggs. Some eggs are released in feces and urine. Other eggs stay in the person's body, causing inflammation and scarring of the intestines or bladder.

Symptoms may include abdominal pain, bloody diarrhea or urine, and genital lesions. Within one to two months, the person may also experience fever, chills, cough, and muscle aches.



Prevention

- Avoid swimming or wading in freshwater where *Schistosoma* larvae may exist.
- Eliminate the snails that allow parasites to develop.
- Treat drinking water from surface water sources, to prevent parasites from entering through skin around the mouth and lips.
- If bathing water comes from a source that may have *Schistosoma* larvae, treat it before bathing.
- Use improved latrines to keep feces from the environment.
- Use large-scale drug treatment for affected and at-risk populations.

HOUSEHOLD WATER TREATMENT OPTIONS

- Filters and disinfection options that are rated "very effective" for helminths (worms).
- Note: *Schistosoma* larvae typically enter through people's skin, not through drinking water.



Treatment

Take praziquantel (antibiotic) for one to two days. In at-risk communities, treat vulnerable groups regularly.