

## Schistosomiasis: an emerging public health problem

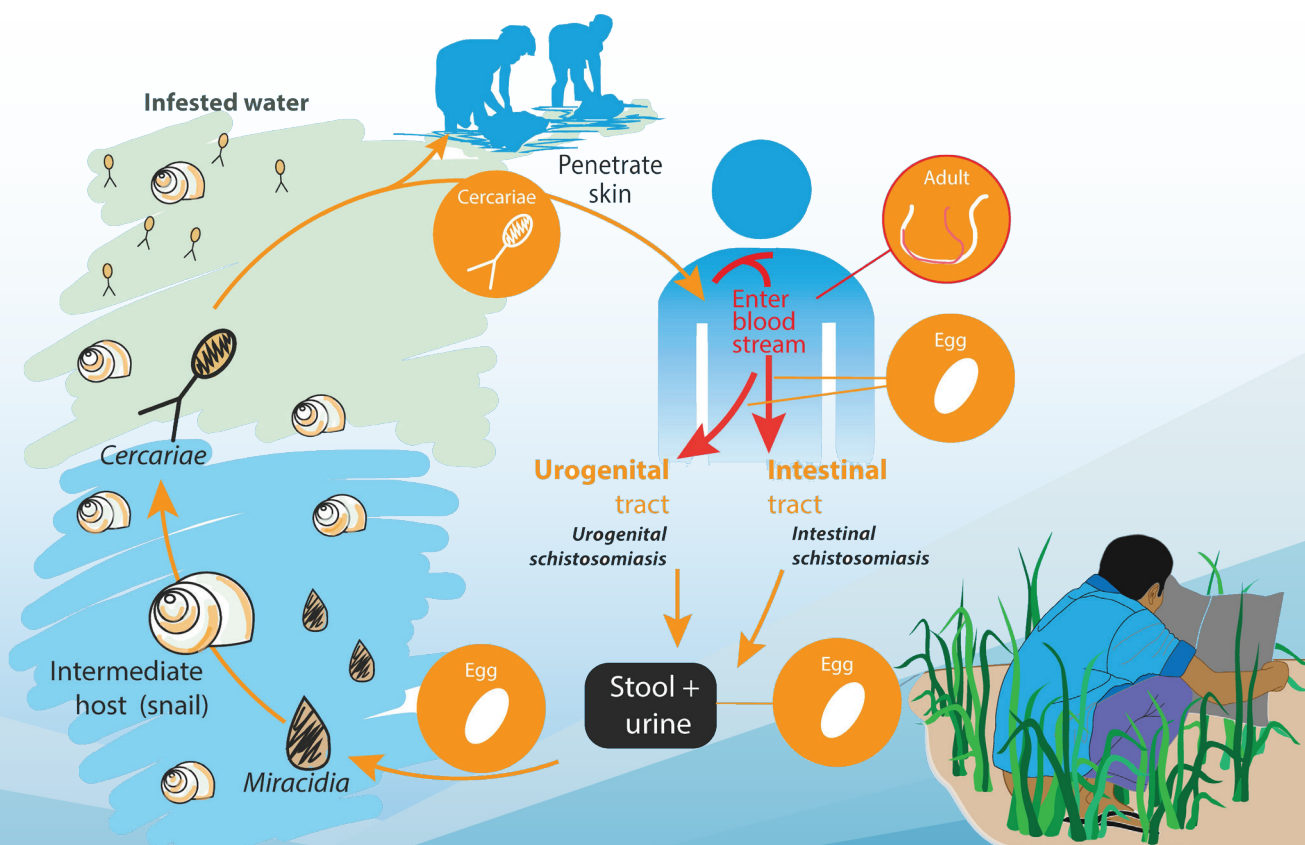
Schistosomiasis is an acute and chronic parasitic disease, found in tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world. Seven hundred million people in 78 countries are estimated to be affected. Schistosomiasis is found near rivers, lakes, canals and ponds. It is present in several ASEAN countries, for instance Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos. Schistosomiasis is also called snail fever – as snail is the intermediate host in the transmission cycle.

Recently, schistosomiasis is reported also from Myanmar, viz. Rakhine State, Southern Shan State (near Lake Inle) and Bago Region. Between October 2016 and 30 June 2018, for instance, 302 cases have been diagnosed at Sittwe General Hospital.

To support the prevention and control efforts by the national health authorities, WHO provided technical guidelines, partook in field investigation and mobilized essential commodities for diagnosis and treatment. At a ceremony chaired by the Union Minister of Health & Sports at Yangon Region Health Directorate on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2018, WHO Representative to Myanmar handed over 15,000 tablets praziquantel, 3,200 kato-katz test kits and 300 urine filtration tests.

An expert mission from WHO HQ, WHO SEARO and China CDC is expected to visit Myanmar end-August 2018, to recommend further ways forward to prevent and control schistosomiasis in the country. Essential public health information is shown below and overleaf. Schistosomiasis is transmitted **from snail to human and from human to snail**. The disease **cannot** be transmitted from human to human.

## Schistosomiasis transmission cycle



People become infected when larval forms of the parasite released by freshwater snails penetrate the skin during contact with infested water. Transmission occurs when people suffering from schistosomiasis contaminate freshwater sources with their excreta containing parasite eggs, which hatch in water.

### Symptoms

- Abdominal pain, diarrhoea and blood in the stool
- Liver and spleen enlargement with abdominal distension
- Blood in the urine
- In advanced stage, urinary bladder cancer and kidney damage
- Genital lesion, vaginal bleeding and nodules in the vulva
- Infertility (long term consequences)

### Diagnosis

- Detection of parasite in the stool or urine (gold standard)
  - Urine filtration (urogenital schistosomiasis)
  - Kato-katz technique (intestinal schistosomiasis)
- Serological and immunological test

### Prevention and control

**snail control**



**access to safe water**



**improved sanitation**



**hygiene education**



**large scale treatment of at risk population (preventive chemotherapy)**



### Target population for treatment

- School aged children in endemic areas
- Adults considered to be at risk of getting the disease
- Fishermen, farmers, irrigation workers, and women whose domestic tasks bring them in contact with infested water.
- Entire communities living in highly endemic areas.