

## SCHISTOSOMIASIS

### What is Schistosomiasis?

- Schistosomiasis, also known as bilharzia, is a disease caused by tiny worms that live in fresh water.
- Infection occurs when your skin comes into contact with young worms.
- The worms can burrow through the skin and travel to the lungs and liver, where they grow into adult worms and start making eggs.
- The worms can live in the blood vessels, bladder or the gut for many years.
- If not treated, the worms and their eggs can cause damage to the liver, intestines and bladder. Rarely, they can cause problems such as seizures (fits).

### Who is at risk?

- If you have lived in, or travelled to areas where schistosomiasis worms live in fresh water (eg in some African countries, the Caribbean, southern China, southeast Asia and the Middle East) you may have been infected in the past.
- People become infected during activities like collecting water, farming or fishing in freshwater canals, streams or lakes.

### What are the symptoms?

- Within days of being infected some people notice a rash or itchy skin.
- Over the next few weeks, fever, headache, cough and muscle aches can occur.
- Most people will not have any symptoms, even with worms living in their body and making eggs.

### How is it diagnosed?

- A blood test will show if you have ever had schistosomiasis.
- If the test is positive you may be asked to give samples of your urine and faeces to see if there are any eggs.
- If eggs are found further tests (eg x-rays) may be needed.

### How is the infection treated?

- Safe and effective drugs are available for treating schistosomiasis.
- Most people with a positive blood test will be offered tablets.
- If eggs are found in your urine or faeces, a second course of treatment might be needed.

**Further information is available from**