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TOP OF THE NEWS

World/Nation

- » **Iraq:** A top U.S. commander blames political stalemate for violence. **A2**
- » **Protests:** Demonstrators march in European capitals over austerity measures. **A6**
- » **9/11:** House passes aid bill for workers sickened during cleanup of World Trade Center. **A8**
- » **A first:** Astronomers detect a planet in another solar system that has essential conditions to support life. **A10**

Bay Area

- » **Veto:** Governor vetoes bill that would have barred fees for debit card use. **C6**
- » **Leaving the bench:** Judge Vaughn Walker, who ruled Prop. 8 unconstitutional, to retire. **C1**
- » **Outsourcing:** Online employment helps ease poverty overseas. **D1**
- » **Bottom Line:** Silicon Valley group's trip to Washington pays off. **D1**

Business

Datebook

- » **Prime cuts:** Creative carnivores gather to learn how to use the entire animal in cooking. **E1**

Ovation

- » **Dance tunes:** The Mark Morris Dance Group's musicality has always kept it a step ahead. **F1**

96 Hours

- » **Sunny melodies:** A B & the Sea's beach party soundtrack. **Page 4**



Eric Rlsberg / Assoc

INVASIVE SPECIES



Lacy Atkins / The Chronicle

Oakland resident Mavin Dixon bakes in the sun Tuesday at Robert W. Crown Memorial State Beach in Alameda, the site of two rare outbreaks of "swimmer's itch," a red rash with pustules.

Tiny snail carries a worm that makes swimmers itch

Executives put on hold at least early 2011

Top court says state found in lethal injection

By Bob Egelko

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

California canceled tonight's scheduled execution of convicted murderer Alton Brown on Wednesday after federal courts rebuffed attempts to delay the death before a prison supply of lethal drugs expired.

The action gives Brown and other condemned inmates who have lost their reprieve until at least early 2011.

After the state's last execution in 2006, a federal judge imposed a moratorium, saying California's slipshod rules for lethal injections created an unacceptable risk of a botched and agonizing execution.

The state responded by revising its rules.

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Tiny snail carries a worm that makes swimmers itch

By Kelly Zito

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

An invasive snail recently discovered in San Francisco Bay has brought along its own unwelcome stowaway: a parasitic worm responsible for only the second known outbreak of "swimmer's itch" along the Pacific Coast of the United States.

Both the initial reports in the mid-1950s and the ongoing incidents of swimmer's itch — an itchy, red rash with pustules similar to those caused by poison oak — occurred at



Andrew Cohen / Center for Research on Aquatic Bioinvasions

A Japanese bubble snail (*Haminoea japonica*).

Robert W. Crown Memorial State Beach in Alameda, according to Andrew Cohen, director of the Center for Re-

search on Aquatic Bioinvasions in Richmond.

"It's really a bizarre coincidence that it would strike the same beach twice so many years apart," Cohen said.

This month, Cohen co-authored an article on the outbreaks for the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. In it, researchers detailed the most recent onset when 90 elementary schoolchildren contracted swimmer's itch in 2005 after a visit to Crown Beach for an end-of-the-year picnic. Seventy-one additional cases have

Itch continues on A12

Execution put on at least early 2

Top court says stay found in lethal inj

By Bob Egelko

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

California canceled tonight's execution of convicted murderer Allen Brown on Wednesday after federal courts rebuffed attempts to delay the death before a prison supply of lethal chemicals expired.

The action gives Brown and other condemned inmates who have lost their reprieve until at least early 2011.

After the state's last execution in 2006, a federal judge imposed a stay, saying California's slipshod rules for lethal injections created an unacceptable risk of botched and agonizing execution.

The state responded by revising its procedures and staff training policies and creating a new death chamber. State law changes complied with standards set by federal court rulings established by a 2008 Supreme Court ruling.

But U.S. District Judge Jeremy Fogel granted a stay of Brown's execution Tuesday, saying he needed time to decide whether the new policies had resolved the defects he found in his 2006 ruling. The state's apparent desire to execute before running out of lethal drugs does not justify a hurried review.

The state was appealing that stay when the California Supreme Court issued its ruling Wednesday that precluded an execution by night.

Execution continues on A12

CAMPAIGN 2010 Governor's Race

A political bombshell — or a political stunt?



Chronic sidewalk soon may be held a

For decades there has been confusion and

C.W. NEVIUS



Lacy Atkins / The Chronicle

In 2005, 90 schoolchildren contracted swimmer's itch after a picnic at Crown Beach in Alameda. Seventy-one additional cases have been reported since then.

Swimmer's itch strikes Alameda again

Itch from page A1

been reported to Alameda County public health authorities since then.

However, Cohen said the real number might be far higher, since many cases are incorrectly linked to other conditions or go unreported.

Immune reaction

Swimmer's itch, or cercarial dermatitis, normally crops up in freshwater. It is an immune system reaction caused when a certain type of parasite emerges from snail shells and attempts to burrow into a host's skin. Usually, the parasite — a microscopic flatworm with a forked tail — bores into the legs and feet of birds, hitches a ride in the bloodstream and settles in the intestines to breed.

In people, the worms are rejected and the rash subsides in a couple of days, or, at most, in a couple of weeks.

Over the past five years, researchers say the worm has wriggled into Bay Area beachgoers' bathing suits from the Japanese bubble snail, a three-quarter-inch-long gastropod first identified in San Francis-



Lea Suzuki / The Chronicle

Oakland resident Judith Mader spends the day at the beach with her granddaughters. She says she hasn't had a problem.

co Bay 10 years ago and in Alameda in 2003. Researchers can't pinpoint exactly how the Asian snails made their way to Northern California. But they may have hitchhiked in shipments of oysters for farming or in the ballast tanks of cargo ships, which are filled with or emptied of water to stabilize the vessels depending on the size of their cargo loads.

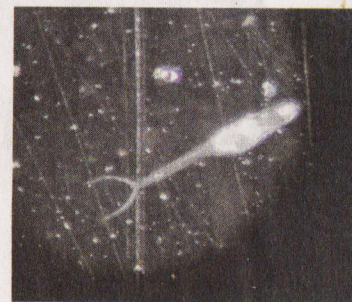
The San Francisco Bay-Delta, the largest and most important estuary on the West

Coast, has at least 234 invasive species of plants and animals and more are being discovered each year.

Warning signs ignored

Warning signs about swimmer's itch posted at Crown Beach have done little to deter fans of the picturesque spot, however.

This week, Judith Mader splashed in the water with her two curly-haired granddaughters, Piza, 2, and Maxine, 7



Andrew Cohen / Center for Research on Aquatic Bioinvasions

The microscopic flatworm parasite is believed to have hitched a ride on the Japanese bubble snail.

months.

"I've been swimming here for years," said the Oakland resident. "And I've never had a problem."

The exponential growth of global commerce is blamed for spreading a host of nonindigenous plants, microbes and animals around the world. Of all invasive species, the zebra mussel is probably the best known.

The freshwater bivalve originated in Russia but has overrun ecosystems around the planet, devouring plankton, clogging water pipelines and choking beaches with their

characteristic striped shells.

"It's hard to estimate the economic damage caused by invasive species," said Jim Gaither, an ecologist with the Nature Conservancy in Sacramento. "It impacts ranching, agriculture, management of water resources, natural areas and fisheries."

Human health impact

What worries Gaither and Cohen most, though, are incidents like those at Crown Beach, in which invasive organisms have a direct impact on human health.

In the early 1990s, a cholera epidemic swept Peru, killing upward of 10,000 people. Tests in Mobile Bay, Ala., during that period showed the same strain of cholera bacteria in the ballast water of 18 ships that had traveled from South America, Cohen said.

"People think of invasive species as an environmental problem," Cohen said. "But we need to remind people that there are serious health impacts of not dealing with invasions."

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