

Poison Ivy, Oak and Sumac

Characteristics:

- Itchy red rash in patches; severe cases may blister. Rash begins 24- 48 hours after exposure to the plant oil.
- Rash is allergic reaction to the oils these plants produce.
- Rash is spread when a small amount of oil remains under child's fingernails, on clothing, shoes, animals, bedding, etc.
- Rash does not spread through contact with rash, only through contact with remaining plant oil.
- Rash resolves in 10-14 days
- The rash looks the same whether caused by poison ivy, oak or sumac. Poison ivy is far more common in our area than poison oak or sumac.

Prevention:

- Know what the plants look like, try to avoid them. The rash can appear from contact with the stem or vine as well as from contact with the leaves of the plant, so it can occur even when the plant has no leaves.
- Wear long pants and long sleeves in wooded areas.
- After known contact, wash exposed areas with large amounts of soap and water for 10 minutes.
- Wash all clothing, shoes and implements with soap and water.

Treatment:

1. Moist cool compresses.
2. Oatmeal (Aveeno) bath - 1 cup in tub of lukewarm water (hot water will increase itching).
3. Burrows Solution - use cool compress for 15 minutes, 3-4 times daily to relieve itching and speed drying.
4. Apply plain Calamine lotion 3-4 times daily to help dry the rash.
5. 1% hydrocortisone cream twice a day for up to a week to decrease inflammation and itch.
6. Oral Benadryl to decrease itching: We do NOT recommend topical Benadryl because its absorption cannot be controlled and toxicity may occur. (See Benadryl dosing chart.) Itch-X may also be helpful.
7. If new spots continue to develop, wash all toys, shoes, jackets, pets, and anything worn when in contact with plant.
8. Cut nails short to avoid scratching.

More severe cases are treated with prescription medications at an office visit.

- Extensive rash on face, eyes, genitals, hands or feet.
- Severe eruptions on any part of body not responding to home methods described above.
- Any evidence of infection (i.e. increasing redness or swelling around blisters, pus, fever, tenderness).

- Oral steroids work best if started early in the course of the rash.
- Poison Ivy rashes take 10-14 days to heal even with steroids. The medication may reduce severity and improve comfort.
- Injectable steroids do not work any better than oral steroids.

Poison Ivy Shots: Allergy shots are no longer available in the United States. There are no benefits - they do not work.