

Poison Ivy

What happens?

- Redness and blisters
- Eruption on exposed body surfaces (like hands)
- Shaped like streaks and patches
- Extreme itchiness
- Onset 1 or 2 days after the patient was in a forest, field or backyard

Poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac cause the same type of rash and are found throughout the United States. More than 50% of people are sensitive to the oil of these plants. Poison ivy usually lasts 2 weeks. Treatment reduces the symptoms but doesn't cure the disease. The best approach is prevention.

Treatment

- ❖ The first sign of a reaction, usually between 24 and 48 hours is a general redness, followed soon by tiny red Bumps and then water blisters. The bumps and blisters tend to appear in lines. Once the rash starts to appear, it is still a good idea to wash the skin thoroughly.
- ❖ Cool soaks - Soak the involved area in cold water or massage it with an ice cube for 20 minutes or as often as necessary. Then let it air dry. This will reduce itching.
- ❖ The best treatment is something simple and soothing. Calamine lotion helps to relieve the itch as it dries the rash. Other bland creams and lotions may help too. Keeping the skin clean will reduce irritation.
- ❖ Be careful about using medications that contain anesthetics or antihistaminics; they may further sensitize the skin. Check with us; other medication may be needed in severe cases.
- ❖ Steroid creams - If applied early a steroid cream can reduce the itching. The sores should be dried up and no longer itchy in 10 to 14 days. In the meantime, cut your child's finger nails short and encourage him not to scratch himself.
- ❖ Contagiousness - The fluid from the sores themselves is not contagious. However, anything that has poison ivy oil or sap on it is contagious for about one week. This includes the shoes and clothes the patient last wore into the woods as well as any pets that may carry oil on their fur. Be sure to wash them off with soap and water. The rash begins 1 to 2 days after skin contact.
- ❖ Prevention - Learn to recognize these plants. Otherwise avoid all plants with three large shiny, green leaves.

Another clue is the presence of shiny black dots on damaged leaves. The sap of the plant turns black when exposed to air. All parts of the plant including the roots may contain the toxic sap.

Wear long pants or socks when walking through the woods that may contain poison ivy, oak or sumac. If you think your child has had contact with one of these plants, wash the exposed areas of the skin with any available soap several times. Do this as soon as possible, because after one hour it is of little value in preventing absorption of oil.

Call our office during regular hours if:

- The face, eyes or lips become involved.
- The itching interferes with sleep.
- Any big blisters develop.
- The rash becomes open and oozing.
- Signs of infection occur such as pus or soft yellow scabs.
- You have other concerns and questions.