



POISON IVY - OVERVIEW



What is poison ivy?

Poison ivy, like poison oak, and poison sumac are plants that can cause a skin rash called allergic contact dermatitis when they touch your skin. The red, uncomfortable, and itchy rash often shows up in lines or streaks and is marked by fluid-filled bumps (blisters) or large raised areas (see photo below on right). The rash is caused by contact with an oil (urushiol) found in poison ivy, oak, or sumac. The oil is present in all parts of the plants, including the leaves, stems, flowers, berries, and roots. Urushiol is an allergen, so the rash is actually an allergic reaction to the oil in these plants. The reaction usually develops 12 to 48 hours after exposure and can last up to eight weeks. The severity of the rash is dependent on the amount of urushiol that gets on your skin.

How can you prevent the rash from poison ivy?

The best way to prevent the rash is to learn to identify (see photo on left) and avoid the plants. When you cannot avoid contact with the plants, heavy clothing (long pants, long-sleeved shirt, and vinyl gloves) and barrier creams or lotions may help protect you.

How is the rash treated?

Most poison ivy rashes can be treated successfully at home. Initial treatment consists of washing the area with soap



and water immediately after contact with the plants. To relieve symptoms, use wet compresses and take cool baths. Nonprescription antihistamines and calamine lotion also may help relieve symptoms. Moderate or severe cases of the rash may require treatment by a doctor, who may prescribe corticosteroid pills, creams, ointments, or shots.

The rash is not contagious. You cannot catch or spread a rash after it appears, even if you touch it or the blister fluid, because the urushiol will already be absorbed or washed off the skin. Typical skin rashes usually go away without any long-term problems. A skin infection may develop if the affected areas are not kept clean.

Serious symptoms may include:

- Swelling of the face, mouth, neck, genitals, or eyelids (which may prevent the eyes from opening).
- Widespread, large blisters that ooze large amounts of fluid.
- Life-threatening reactions may occur if the poisonous ingredients are swallowed or are breathed in (which can happen when the plants are burned).

For more information, contact TOIRMA at (888) 562-7861

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