

**What is poison ivy?**

Poison ivy is a contact dermatitis, or rash with blisters. The rash with blisters is caused by an allergic reaction to the oily substance (urushiol) in the leaves, stalks, roots, flowers, and berries of the plant.

How do I identify poison ivy?

The compound leaves of poison ivy consist of three pointed leaflets; the middle leaflet has a much longer stalk than the two side ones. The leaflet edges can be smooth or toothed but are rarely lobed. The leaves vary greatly in size, from 8 to 55 mm in length. They are reddish when they emerge in the spring, turn green during the summer, and become various shades of yellow, orange or red in the autumn. When in doubt, always remember - "LEAVES OF THREE, LET THEM BE!"

Who gets poison ivy?

Anyone can get poison ivy. Contact with poison ivy is one of the most frequent causes of skin rash in children during the spring, summer and fall seasons. The oils of these plants can cause a reaction in over 50% of people.

What are the symptoms of poison ivy?

Symptoms usually appear within 1-3 days of exposure, but may appear as long as 3 weeks later. Redness and extreme itching are the first signs. A rash appears on areas that were exposed to the oils and is often in the pattern of streaks or patches consistent with where the plant touched the skin. The rash may form red pimples or may form large, weeping blisters. The worst stage of the rash is usually experienced four to seven days after exposure. The rash may last for one to two weeks. Reactions can

vary from very mild in some individuals to very severe in highly sensitive individuals, sometimes even requiring hospitalization.

How is poison ivy spread?

Any body part may be affected, as long as it comes in direct contact with the oil of the plant or with smoke from burning poison ivy. Rubbing or scratching if within 20 minutes of initial contact with the oil may also spread the oil from one part of the body to another. Wind or dust can carry particles of urushiol to other plants, where it may be picked up, and pets can also carry the oil on their fur. It is not spread by the fluid of the blisters, thus is not contagious person to person, unless the oil remains on the skin and is touched by another person.

What is the treatment for poison ivy?

Poison ivy is a self-limiting condition. Treatment does not cure poison ivy; it just eases the discomfort. Without treatment, a mild case will resolve in approximately 2 weeks. Keep your hands away from your eyes, mouth and face. Though it is difficult, try not to scratch, as this may cause infection. Cool compresses such as Domeboro soaks or Aveeno may offer some relief. Calamine lotion may help (topical Benadryl may make the rash worse). Antihistamines (Benadryl oral) may relieve the itching at night to help with sleep. Medications must be fitted to your own particular needs. If your doctor prescribes medication, be sure to follow instructions. A medicine called Corticosteroids may be prescribed for more serious cases of rash with swelling (over the counter Corticosteroids are too weak to be effective). Topical Midpotency Corticosteroids should be applied with a large bandage dressing and mild pressure and repeated in 24 hours. In cases of severe or extensive rash, especially around the face or genitals, your doctor may prescribe oral medicine.

Call immediately for emergency medical assistance if:

The individual begins to experience a severe allergic reaction such as:

- swelling of the airway (throat, tongue, mouth or nose)
- difficulty breathing or swallowing
- weakness
- dizziness
- bluish lips or mouth
- unconsciousness
- history of having experienced a severe reaction to poison ivy from a past exposure
- coughing following exposure to the smoke of burning poison ivy plants

Notify your physician if any of the following happens:

- The itching is severe and cannot be controlled
- The rash affects the face, lips, eyes or genitals
- You develop a fever over 100 degrees Fahrenheit
- The rash or blisters show signs of infection such as pus, yellow fluid leaking from blisters, odor or increased tenderness.
- The prescribed treatments and medicines do not bring relief within a few days.

Can a person get poison ivy again?

- Yes, anytime exposure to the plant oil occurs.

What can be done to prevent the spread of poison ivy?

Learn to identify these plants and teach your children to identify them as soon as they are able. Teach them to avoid contact with the plants or smoke caused by burning the plants. Over the counter creams such as Ivy Block or Stoko Gard Outdoor Cream applied at least 15 minutes before exposure form a barrier against the plant's sap. If you plan to be in an area where poison ivy grows, wear long sleeves and long pants. Wear vinyl gloves (urushoil can soak through rubber). Rinse off tools after using them. Wash your clothing and shoes. Wash any body surfaces that have had contact with the poison ivy as soon as possible (preferably within 5-10 minutes after exposure). Be sure to clean under your fingernails as oil can be spread from scratching if it is under the nails. Do not touch the skin or clothing of the exposed person with your bare hands. Bathe animals that may have been exposed and can carry the oils on their fur.