



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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Poison Ivy

Poison Ivy rash is an allergic contact dermatitis caused by exposure to the oils of the poison ivy plant. The plants grow as vines and attach to trees, telephone poles, other plants, along fences, rocks and paths. Exposure is possible year round.

The oil is frequently transferred from the hands and other contaminated items to other parts of the body where the rash then appears. **The fluid in the blisters will not spread the eruptions elsewhere on the body or to other people. EXPOSURE MUST COME FROM PLANT OILS.**

Symptoms

A typical reaction will consist of itching, redness, and irregular groups of blisters. In more severe reactions swelling may also occur.

The reaction time after the first exposure may be 5-14 days, while the reaction time after subsequent re-exposure may be 6-48 hours. With massive exposure, symptoms may appear in 6-12 hours. The extent of the rash depends on the areas with which the plant has been in contact. The severity of the eruption depends on both the amount of oils deposited on the skin and the degree of allergic sensitivity of the person. Symptoms subside in 2-3 weeks.

Prevention

Avoidance of contact or wearing protective clothing are the only effective preventive measures.

Others include washing the entire body thoroughly especially under fingernails, as soon as possible after exposure to the poison ivy plant; wash shoes, shoelaces, and glasses, belts, jewelry, sports equipment, garden tools, and any other items of clothing or apparel that may have been in contact with the plant.

Animals can transmit poison ivy if they have resin on their fur. Also, do not burn the poison ivy plant as the allergen can be transmitted through the smoke.

“Spreading” of poison ivy is most likely due to touching items of clothing, apparel, or jewelry, etc., that have been in contact with the oil and have not been washed thoroughly.

Treatment

For mild cases:

- Cool water compresses or Domeboro compresses (dissolve 1 tablet in 1 pint of cold water) for 15-20 minutes 3 or 4 times a day.
- Soothing lotions such as Calamine, or 1/2% hydrocortisone - applying a thin film 3 or 4 times a day.
- Antihistamine such as Benadryl - take as directed on package.

Treatment for moderate to severe cases will be determined by your practitioner.

When to Seek Medical Attention
Return to the Health Center if you experience any of the following:

- You develop a fever over 100 °F.
- The rash or blisters seem to become infected.
- The prescribed program and medication do not bring relief within 48-72 hours.
- The rash begins to affect areas around the eyes.

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