

## DESCRIPTION

Poison ivy, oak, and sumac are three types of plants that cause a skin reaction (contact dermatitis). The reaction results from contact with an oily substance (urushiol) produced by these plants. An initial reaction typically occurs between 24 and 48 hours after exposure to the plant but new areas of rash may continue to appear up to two weeks after the first symptoms developed. Areas of rash that appear later do not represent “spreading” of the rash itself. Rather, these are areas that are either less sensitive or came into contact with less of the plant’s oil. The clear to yellow fluid produced by the rash is not contagious and will not cause the rash to “spread”.

## FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Skin rash with the following signs:

- Bright red spots that develop 24 to 48 hours (sometimes may take several days) after contact.
- Intense itching and burning.
- Blisters (the fluid in blisters is not contagious).
- Weeping, crusting, and swelling.
- Enough of the oily resin remains on hands or clothing so that the rash is carried to other body parts, such as the face or genitals.

## CAUSES

Contact with any part of the poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac plants. They grow as vines or bushes and have three leaves (poison ivy and poison oak), or a row of paired leaves (poison sumac). They produce a potent resin (urushiol) that is the cause of the problem. A reaction may also occur from touching the poison substance when it is on clothing, shoes, equipment (gardening, hunting, golfing, or athletic), or animals, such as pets. It can also come from any smoke these plants give off if they are burned. This may affect the face, eyelids, throat, and lungs.

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Learn to identify and avoid contact with these plants.
- When walking in areas where these plants grow, wear shoes, socks, long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and, sometimes, gloves. Use a product that prevents the poison from getting on your skin. Wash clothing and effective equipment as soon as possible.
- If exposed, washing the skin immediately with soap and water and sponging with rubbing alcohol may prevent the rash.
- Within 15 minutes after contacting the plant, the resin binds with your skin’s proteins and cannot be washed off or transferred to other parts of the body.

## GENERAL MEASURES

- Sweating and heat make the itching worse, so try to stay cool and dry. Apply cool compresses to the affected areas.
- A soothing bath helps. Use Aveeno (a product made of oatmeal) or baking soda (about a half cup per bath).
- Wash all clothing and shoes, and any equipment that came in contact with the plant oils, with soap and water or cleanse with rubbing alcohol. **NEVER USE BLEACHES ON SKIN.**
- Give pets a warm, soapy bath to remove any oil from the fur.
- Itching, redness, and swelling often improve in a few days, and complete healing occurs in 7 to 14 days.

## MEDICATIONS

- You may use calamine lotion or antihistamine creams or sprays to relieve the itching.
- Drying agents such as Domeboro soaks may also be helpful.
- Your healthcare provider may prescribe topical steroid.
- Oral steroids may also be prescribed to reduce inflammation in severe cases.
  - You should begin your steroid prescription today.
  - You should begin your steroid prescription tomorrow.
- ↳ Unless your doctor says otherwise, always finish the full course of your steroid prescription, even if you start to feel better.
- ↳ Steroids may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Use an alternative method of contraception for the remainder of the month after finishing your steroid prescription.

## SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- If swelling or pain develops around the eyes, nose, or genitals.
- Rash gets worse or doesn’t improve with self-care methods.
- You develop a fever or notice any signs of infection, such as increased redness around the rash, pus, or if red streaks develop.