

POISON IVY

The advice, “Leaves of three, let them be,” is familiar to many people because mom and dad and grandma and grandpa always told you that. It’s a reminder to stay away from plants that feature three leaves to a stem, such as poison ivy. Poison ivy and poison oak, another plant with leaves of three, are common causes of those summer skin irritations called contact dermatitis. Poison sumac, which has many leaves to a stem, is another offender. Contact with poison ivy can cause a red, itchy rash consisting of small bumps, blisters or swelling.

Most people are sensitive to poison ivy and these other plants to some degree. The irritating oily substance is the same for each of these plants; the oily resin is called urushiol (u-ROO she-ol).

Rashes caused by poison ivy and its cousins generally aren’t serious; however, they certainly can be bothersome. Treatment for poison ivy mostly consists of self-care methods to relieve the itching until the reaction goes away.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A POISON IVY RASH INCLUDE:

- **Redness**
- **Itching**
- **Swelling**
- **Blisters**

Often, the rash has a linear appearance because of the way the plant brushes against your skin; however, if you come into contact with a piece of clothing or a pet fur that has the oily resin on it, the rash may be more diverse.

The reaction usually develops a day or two after your exposure and can last up to three weeks, even with treatment, in severe cases, new areas of the rash may break out several days or more from the initial exposure. This may seem like the rash is spreading; however, it’s most likely due to renewed contact with the urushiol or to the rate at which your skin is absorbing the oily resin.

Your skin must come in direct contact with the oil from the plant itself in order for you to be affected. Spreading blister fluid through scratching doesn’t spread the rash, but germs under your fingernails may cause a secondary infection.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING OCCURS:

- The reaction is severe or widespread.
- The rash affects sensitive areas of your body, such as your eyes, mouth or genitals.
- Blisters are oozing pus.
- You develop a fever greater than 100 F.
- The rash doesn’t get better within a few weeks.

**If you would like more information, please contact
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