



Poison Ivy, Oak, or Sumac

What is it?

Poison ivy, oak and sumac are plants that produce a gummy sap that can cause an allergic reaction. A reaction may start from direct contact with the leaves, stems or vines of the plants. It can also start indirectly from contact with clothing that has sap on it or from the smoke of burning plant leaves.

What are the symptoms?

A red, itchy rash which usually appears within 12 to 48 hours after exposure and lasts 10 days to four weeks. Swelling, blistering and oozing may also occur.

What is the treatment?

- Clean the affected skin as quickly as possible with rubbing alcohol, and then wash the affected area with water. Finally, take a regular shower with soap and warm water.
- Bathing in lukewarm water with oatmeal can help ease skin discomfort. For additional itch relief, topical products can be used or your health care provider may prescribe other medications.
- To minimize risk of infection, avoid scratching the blisters. For children: trim fingernails and encourage use of itch relief remedies.
- If the rash is severe or involves the eyes, face or genitals, contact your health care provider for treatment.

How does the rash spread?

A sensitive person does not need to make direct contact with a poison ivy, oak or sumac plant to have an allergic reaction. Just touching something that has come in contact with the plant can cause a rash. Petting a dog or cat that has rubbed against one of the plants is a common example. The sap of the plant can remain active for up to one year on objects such as clothing and garden tools. Careful washing of these items will prevent re-exposure. Once the exposed area has been thoroughly washed, **poison ivy is not spread by skin-to-skin contact**. Oozing from blisters will not spread the rash. Neither will bathing or showering.

How can you prevent it?

- Learn to identify poison ivy, oak or sumac. Teach children to recognize these plants and to avoid contact with them.
- Destroy poison ivy and oak growing around your house either chemically or by physically removing the plants; **do not burn them**. Remember to wear protective clothing.
- When walking in fields and wooded areas, wear long pants, socks and long-sleeved shirts. Wash these if you think you may have had contact with any poisonous plants.

For more information call the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-7777 or visit www.myguilford.com