

POISONOUS PLANTS

What is poison ivy and poison oak?

With their leaves usually grouped three to a stem, poison ivy and poison oak are two of the most common causes of allergic skin reaction called contact dermatitis.

What happens when you come into contact with poison ivy or poison oak?

Contact with poison ivy or poison oak usually causes red, swollen skin, blisters and severe itching.

How long does it take before a reaction occurs, and how long does the rash last?

The reaction to poison ivy or poison oak typically develops within 2 days after exposure, but it can develop as soon as a few hours. The rash usually reaches its peak after about 5 days, and is usually gone within 1 to 2 weeks.

What is the cause of the rash?

The rash is caused by exposure to resin; a colorless, oily substance contained in all parts of these plants. Resin transfers easily from clothing or from pet hair to your skin. Do not burn the plants; this could cause internal and external reactions due to smoke inhalation.

How is the oil (resin) spread?

It only takes a tiny amount of resin to cause a reaction. Poison ivy and poison oak *do not* develop as a result of merely being near the plant. The rash *does not* spread as a result of washing or scratching open rash blisters. However, it can be spread by accidentally rubbing the resin on other areas of the skin before all the resin is washed off.

Treatment

- Washing the harmful resin off the skin with soapy water within 5 or 10 minutes after exposure may avert a skin reaction.
- Do not try to remove the resin by taking a bath. Bathing can spread the resin to other areas of your body.
- Wash any clothing or jewelry that may have been in contact with the plant. Footwear should also be washed.
- Try not to scratch. Take cool showers.
- Over-the-counter preparations (calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream) can ease itching, or apply a paste of baking soda or Epsom salts and water.
- Creams and lotions do not help much when the blisters open, but they can be used again when the blisters close.
- Do not apply alcohol because this tends to make the itching worse. Cover up open blisters with sterile gauze to prevent infection.
- To avoid exposure, learn to recognize poisonous plants and wear protective clothing when appropriate.

If you have a severe reaction, or when your eyes, face or genital area is involved, contact Health Services or your healthcare provider.

Contact your physician if you have any questions or problems.