



PUBLIC FACT SHEET

POISON IVY

What is poison ivy?

Poison ivy is a blister-like rash caused by contact with the oil of the poison ivy plant. The oil is released when the plant is bruised.

How is poison ivy spread?

- Direct contact – touching the oil from the plant
- Indirect contact – touching something that has the oil from the plant on it (person, clothing, fur on pets, garden tools, sports equipment etc.)
- Airborne contact – burning poison ivy plants puts the oil particles into the air
- The oil from the plant begins to absorb into the skin within minutes from contact.
- It is **not** contagious from the skin rash or from the fluid in the blisters.

What are possible symptoms?

Symptoms include a red, itchy rash that may occur in a streak or line. After a day or two the rash will turn into small fluid-filled blisters. Sometimes a headache and fever occur. The skin may continue to break out up to two weeks after the rash first appears. The oil is absorbed more slowly into skin that is thicker; therefore it takes longer for the rash to appear on some areas of the body. It should disappear in two weeks if there is no more contact with the poison ivy plant.

What is the treatment for poison ivy?

- Wash all exposed areas with cold running water as soon as possible. If you do this within 5 minutes, the water may help keep the oil from contacting your skin and spreading to other parts of your body. Do not use soap the first time you rinse the skin. The soap can carry the oil to other parts of your body.
- Wash anything that has been in contact with the oil or the poison ivy plant (clothes, garden tools, shoes, toys, camping equipment etc.). The oil from the poison ivy plant can sometimes remain on these surfaces for years if not cleaned.
- Apply calamine lotion to the rash to help dry the rash and relieve itching.
- Cortisone can help prevent the rash if used early. If you know you have been exposed and you have had a bad reaction to poison ivy in the past – contact your doctor.

For more information on poison ivy:

Ottawa County Health Department

www.miOttawa.org

American Academy of Dermatology

www.aad.org/public/Publications/pamphlets/Poison_IvyOakSumac.htm