



Poison Ivy

Poison ivy plants contain urushiol, an oil that approximately 65% of the population is allergic to. Urushiol soaks into the skin within 10 to 60 minutes after contact, and a rash may develop 12 to 48 hours after exposure. Areas exposed to smaller amounts of urushiol, as well as those parts of the body covered with thicker skin, take longer to develop a reaction. This means that you should not be surprised if new areas of redness, itching, or blistering still crop up days after a rash's initial blossoming.

To prevent a poison ivy-related outbreak:

- **Learn to recognize and avoid poison ivy.** The general rule is “leaves of three, let them be.” Unfortunately, leaf colors and shapes vary from plant to plant and species to species. Poison ivy can also take different forms, and it may appear as a vine or shrub. Furthermore, in wintertime, leafless branches still contain urushiol, so never touch or pull on a seemingly dead poison ivy vine.
- **Create barriers between the leaves and your skin.** If you know that you will be in an area that may contain poison ivy (i.e. garden or wooded area), protect yourself by wearing long sleeves, long pants, shoes, and gloves. Creams containing bentoquatam can also protect the skin from urushiol.
- **Wash everything that may have come into contact with the plant.** You can get poison ivy from sources other than the plant itself. Once urushiol is deposited on something (i.e. clothing), that item can trigger a rash until the chemical is washed away. Also, keep in mind that pets can carry the oil on their fur and transfer considerable amounts to you when they return home.
- **Act quickly.** If you know that you have come into contact with poison ivy, immediately wash the exposed area thoroughly with soap and water.

If you experience an outbreak:

- **Know that popped blisters cannot spread the rash.** Contrary to popular belief, the fluid from within the blisters will not cause the rash to spread. New lesions appearing in straight lines a few days after the initial rash are usually due to smaller quantities of urushiol that were deposited on the skin.
- **Avoid scratching.** While scratching will not spread the rash, it may injure the skin and increase the risk of infection. To relieve itching, try calamine lotion, oatmeal baths, and cool compresses.
- **Monitor the outbreak.** Call your doctor if the rash develops close to your eyes, you experience increased pain, redness, or fever, or the symptoms do not improve within two or three weeks.

Source: UnitedHealthcare

For more information regarding the TeamHealth Wellness Program, go to the Wellness Website (teamhealth.com/wellness).