

Poison Ivy, Oak, Sumac

Finally we have some warm weather to enjoy. Don't ruin your fun with a case of poison ivy, oak or sumac. Unfortunately our lovely water front is riddled with poison ivy. Avoidance is the best policy. All parts of the plants are poisonous, including vines, stems and leaves. They are poisonous year round. Never burn the plants as this can expose you to poison in the smoke which can cause very serious inflammation in the lungs. You can go online at www.poisonivy.us to see pictures to help you identify the plants.

Facts about Poison Ivy, Poison Oak and Poison Sumac

- All parts of the plant, including the root system, contain urushiol and are potentially allergenic. Plants are allergenic all year round, not just when they have leaves. Even dead plants can cause lesions.
- The serum released from the vesicular lesions of poison ivy, oak, or sumac does not spread the rash and is not contagious to others. Scratching the lesions will not spread the rash but may cause secondary skin damage or infection.
- The majority of children are sensitive to urushiol, the allergic oil of the plant, with sensitivity increasing during the first decade of life. Prior lack of allergic response to urushiol does not guarantee future lack of response.
- Soap and water wash will not prevent lesions if the urushiol has been on the skin for greater than 10 minutes.
- Urushiol can remain on gardening, sporting, or camping equipment for weeks causing allergic contact dermatitis unless washed off with soap and water.
- Treatment will not reduce the duration of symptoms but can reduce the severity.
- Urushiol can become airborne when plants are burned, or cut with a mower or weed-whacker. Poison ivy, oak and sumac should not be burned, and protection should be taken when doing yard work in areas with these plants.

Treatment of Poison Ivy, Oak and Sumac Dermatitis

Topical Treatment after Contact

- Wash skin with soap and water as soon as contact identified, preferably within 10 minutes of contact.
- If greater than 10 minutes, but not more than 8 hours has elapsed since contact, wash skin with Tecnu. (over the counter approx. \$5.95)

Topical Treatment of Lesions

- Keep lesions clean by washing with mild soap and water daily. Mild debridement of crusted lesions with soap and water is beneficial.
- Open vesicles so serum can drain. May lightly wrap weeping lesions with gauze but do not use prolonged occlusive dressings.
- May use over-the-counter preparation such as Calamine lotion or Ivy Rest to reduce itching and dry lesions. Do not use topical preparations with antihistamines, benzocaine, or with neomycin sulfate due to the potential for development of sensitization.
- Tepid baths with colloidal oatmeal (Aveeno) may reduce itching. Hot water baths or showers increase itching.
- Tap water or Burrow's or Domeboro solutions applied with dressings to blistered or oozing lesions for 20 minutes twice a day helps dry weepy lesions.

Systemic Treatment

Antihistamines are effective for controlling itching. They may be taken 3-4 times per day unless sedation interferes with activities of daily living or school.

- Diphenhydramine (Benedryl) 25 mg every 4 hours. (adult dose)
- Chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton) 2-4mg every 4 hours. (adult dose)

Systemic glucocorticoids (steroids) are used for severe allergic dermatitis unless there are contraindications. This will require a prescription from your health care provider.

Antibiotics may be needed for secondary bacterial infection. This will require a prescription from your health care provider.

If you have questions about a poison ivy, oak or sumac, or have a severe case that needs evaluation by a provider please make an appointment at health service by calling X3156.