



MIDDLEBORO PEDIATRICS

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Poison Ivy (Plant Dermatitis)

Poison ivy is a rash caused by a reaction to the oil of the poison ivy plant. Poison oak and poison sumac cause similar rashes. These plants are found throughout the United States and more than 50% of people are sensitive to their oils.

The rash consists of streaks or patches of redness and blisters, which are extremely itchy. It usually erupts on exposed body surfaces, such as the hands or legs, within one or two days after exposure to a poison ivy, oak, or sumac plant. It generally lasts about two weeks.

Apply Cool Soaks. To reduce itching, soak the involved area in cold water or massage it with an ice cube for 20 minutes as often as necessary. Then let it air dry. An anti-itch cream or lotion such as PRAX can also be used. For moderate and severe itch, Benadryl by mouth (not topically) can be used. The dose is 1 teaspoon for every 25 pounds of body weight or one 25 mg. capsule for every 50 pounds. This dose can be repeated every six hours. Be aware that Benadryl often causes drowsiness. You may need to decrease the day time dose if this occurs, but still give the full dose at bed time.

Apply steroid cream. For milder cases of poison ivy, a steroid cream can be used to lessen the rash. The doctor will discuss whether over the counter or prescription strength is required and how often it needs to be applied. For more severe cases of poison ivy, oral steroids may be required. This always requires an office visit to be certain of the diagnosis, and to tailor the treatment to the individual child. If your child is placed on oral steroids, please follow the directions precisely.

Take steps to keep the rash from spreading. The fluid from the rash itself is not contagious. Anything that has poison ivy oil or sap on it, however, is contagious for about one week. This includes the shoes and clothes your child was wearing when she came in contact with the plant and any pets that have oil on their fur. Be sure to wash any items, or pets, that may have oil on them with soap and water.

Take preventive measures. Teach your child to recognize poison ivy, oak, and sumac plants. Avoid all plants with three large, shiny, green leaves. Another clue is the presence of shiny black spots on damaged leaves. (The sap of the plant turns black when exposed to air.) The poison ivy plant can cause a rash even after the leaves turn red in the fall.

Have your child wear long pants and socks when walking through woods, fields, or any other area that may contain poison ivy, oak, or sumac. If you think your child may have been in contact with one of these plants, wash exposed areas of skin several times with any available soap. Do this as soon as possible since washing is of little value in preventing absorption of the oil into the skin after one hour. Avoid burning these plants because the smoke can cause a severe respiratory reaction.

Call our office during regular hours if:

- # The rash spreads to the face, eyes or lips.
- # The itching interferes with sleep.
- # Any big blisters develop.
- # The rash becomes open and oozing.
- # Signs of infection occur, such as pus or soft, yellow scabs.
- # The rash lasts longer than two weeks.
- # You have other concerns or questions.

