

Allergy/Asthma Specialists W. MI

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Poison Ivy

Definition:

Poison Ivy is a common plant that is part of the plant species *Toxicodendron* which causes a rash that is called contact dermatitis. The rash develops through contact with an oily substance called urushiol (you-ROO-shee-ol).

Urushiol is found in the sap of poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac. The oil is highly irritating and can remain on your clothes or footwear for months.

If you're not sure what poison ivy looks like, the plant is a woody shrub or vine with hairy looking roots. It can reach 10 feet or more, appearing on trees, walls and fences or trails on the ground. The leaves of the plant are clustered in groups of three. It's important to note that all parts of the plant are poisonous throughout the year.

Symptoms:

The symptoms of poison ivy include:

- A red, bumpy, itchy rash
- Slight swelling of the rash
- A rash that turns into Itchy or pus-filled blisters

Complications:

Poison ivy does not generally cause any complications. However, some individuals are severely allergic to poison ivy and other plants. Therefore, if any of the following symptoms occur, you should seek medical attention immediately:

- Swelling of the throat, tongue, or lips
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- Weakness or dizziness
- Bluish lips and/or mouth
- Unconsciousness

Tests and Procedures:

Most poison ivy allergies can be treated at home. In some cases, your doctor may need to treat the problem. If so, your physician will ask for a description of your symptoms and conduct a thorough medical examination of your skin and body.

Treatment:

- Wash each exposed area with plenty of soap and cold running water within five minutes of contact, which can prevent the spread of urushiol. You should also wash any and all clothing or footwear that has come in contact with urushiol.
- Take cool showers and apply over-the-counter products such as calamine lotion that can relieve itching and swollen skin.
- Prescription cortisone creams may be necessary if the allergic reaction is extensive or severe. Contact your physician or dermatologist as soon as possible if you have had serious reactions to poison ivy in the past.

Prognosis (Expectations):

Poison ivy is usually easy to treat, provided that the individual is not severely allergic to the plant. A good outcome can be expected with prompt and appropriate treatment.

Tips:

- Contact your physician if you have difficulty breathing. This is a serious health emergency and requires immediate medical care.
- Over-the-counter creams that contain bentoquatam can help prevent poison ivy if it is applied before you have contact with urushiol.
These products are:
 - Ivyblock (by EnviroDerm)
 - Hydropel
 - Hollister moisture barrier
 - Stokeyard outdoor cream
- Be aware that you can get poison ivy from direct, indirect and airborne contact with urushiol.
- The best prevention of poison ivy is recognizing the plants and avoiding them at all times while outdoors.
- The poison ivy rash cannot pass from person to person; only urushiol can be spread by contact.