

Taking the Itch out of Poison Ivy

Poison ivy is not an infection but a reaction to oil in the leaves of the poison ivy plant.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The child has extremely itchy streaks or patches of redness and/or blisters on exposed body surfaces. The rash usually lasts two or three weeks. He may have a fair amount of swelling on his face.

HOW LONG BEFORE IT DEVELOPS?

The illness can develop two to three days after contact with the plant's oil.

HOW DO I CONTRACT POISON IVY?

The child is not contagious. Only contact with the oil from poison ivy can cause rash. It can spread from:

- Direct contact with poison ivy.
- Contact with clothing or objects that touched poison ivy.
- Contact with a pet that touched poison ivy.
- Burning poison ivy; it will spread it through smoke, which can harm the eyes, nose, throat and lungs.

HOW CAN I PREVENT CONTACT WITH POISON IVY?

- Wear long sleeves and long socks or pants when at risk for contact.
- Visit a camping store for products that are useful to block skin contact with poison ivy.
- Teach children: "Leaves of three, leave them be," and how to identify poison ivy.

HOW DO I PREVENT IT FROM SPREADING?

- Rinse affected areas in soap and water right away for several minutes. Sitting in a bath may expose other body parts to the oil.
- Remove all clothing, shoes and equipment that may have touched the poison ivy.
- Bathe any pets that may have touched the poison ivy.
- Trim and clean fingernails so the child will not scratch the rash area.
- Apply a thin layer of hydrocortisone cream. Be sure to follow directions on the label and avoid eye contact.
- Use oral antihistamines as directed by the child's doctor.

WHEN CAN THE CHILD RETURN TO SCHOOL?

There are no restrictions unless the child is too uncomfortable to attend.

CALL THE CHILD'S DOCTOR IF YOU SEE:

- He has a large area of rash that causes extreme discomfort despite care. The child's doctor may prescribe oral steroids.
- Facial swelling
- Severe itching
- Signs of infection
- Rash lasting longer than two weeks

Resources: www.familydoctor.org, www.kidshealth.org, <http://find.galegroup.com>, www.nps.gov

This general healthcare information should not be used as a substitute or in place of contacting the child's healthcare provider. Visit www.choa.org or call 404-250-KIDS to speak to a pediatric nurse if you need further assistance.