

# Poison Ivy - Oak - Sumac

## *Pediatric HouseCalls Symptom Checker*

### DEFINITION

- A very itchy, blistering rash caused by contact with the poison ivy plant

### Symptoms

- Localized redness, swelling, and weeping blisters
- Located on exposed body surfaces (such as the hands) or areas touched by the hands (e.g., the face or genitals). May be carried by pets.
- Extreme itchiness
- Onset 1 or 2 days after the patient was in a forest or field
- Rash is shaped like streaks or lines

### Cause

- Caused by oil from poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac plants
- The oil is found in the leaves, stems, berries and roots of the plant.
- May be carried by pets.

### Return to School

- Poison ivy or oak is not contagious to others. No need to miss any school or daycare.

### See More Appropriate Topic (instead of this one) If

- It doesn't look like poison ivy, see [RASH - LOCALIZED AND CAUSE UNKNOWN.](#)

## WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

### Call Your Doctor Now (night or day) If

- Your child looks or acts very sick
- Difficulty breathing or severe coughing following exposure to burning weeds
- Looks infected (e.g., soft yellow scabs, pus or spreading redness)

### Call Your Doctor Within 24 Hours (between 9 am and 4 pm) If

- You think your child needs to be seen
- Swelling is severe (e.g., the eyes are swollen shut)
- Severe poison ivy reaction in the past
- Rash involves more than one fourth of the body
- Face, eyes, lips or genitals are involved
- Severe itching (e.g., can't sleep)
- Big blisters or oozing sores
- Taking oral steroids for over 24 hours and rash becoming worse

## Call Your Doctor During Weekday Office Hours If

- You have other questions or concerns
- Rash lasts longer than 3 weeks

## Parent Care at Home If

- Mild poison ivy or sumac and you don't think your child needs to be seen

## HOME CARE ADVICE FOR MILD POISON IVY

1. **Steroid Cream:** Apply 1% hydrocortisone cream 4 times per day to reduce itching. Keep the cream in the refrigerator (Reason: It feels better if applied cold).
2. **Local Cold:** Soak the involved area in cool water for 20 minutes or massage it with an ice cube as often as necessary to reduce itching and oozing.
3. **Antihistamines:** If itching persists, give Benadryl orally every 6 hours as needed (see Dosage table).
4. **Avoid Scratching:** Cut the fingernails short and discourage scratching to prevent a secondary infection from bacteria.
5. **More Poison Ivy:**
  - If new blisters occur several days after the first ones, your child probably has ongoing contact with poison ivy oil.
  - To prevent recurrences, bathe all dogs or other pets.
  - Also, wash all clothes and shoes that were with your child on the day of exposure.

### Contagiousness:

- Poison ivy or oak is not contagious to others.
- The fluid from the blisters or rash cannot cause poison ivy.
- No need to miss any school or daycare.

**Expected Course:** Usually lasts 2 weeks. Treatment reduces the severity of symptoms, not how long they last.

### Call Your Doctor If:

- Poison ivy lasts for over 3 weeks
- It looks infected
- Your child becomes worse

**And remember, contact your doctor if your child develops any of the "Call Your Doctor" symptoms.**

## References

1. Epstein WL, Guin JD, Maibach HI. Poison ivy update. *Contemp Pediatr.* 2000;17(4):54-74.
2. Hogan PA and Weston WL. Persistent symptoms: An itch that won't go away. *Contemp Pediatr.* 1992;9(7):100.
3. Tunnessen WW. Poison ivy, oak, and sumac: The three witches of summer. *Contemp Pediatr.* 1985;2:24-31.
4. Weston WL and Weston JA Allergic contact dermatitis in children. *Am J Dis Child.* 1984;38:932-936.

**Disclaimer:** This information is not intended be a substitute for professional medical advice. It is provided for educational purposes only. You assume full responsibility for how you choose to use this information.

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