

# Poison Ivy - Oak - Sumac

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## 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 child care.

## Care Advice

1. Steroid Cream: Apply 1% hydrocortisone cream (no prescription needed) 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 (no prescription needed) orally every 6 hours as needed.
4. Avoid Scratching: Cut the fingernails short and discourage scratching to prevent a secondary infection from bacteria.
5. More Poison Ivy:
  - a. If new blisters occur several days after the first ones, your child probably has ongoing contact with poison ivy oil.
  - b. To prevent recurrences, bathe all dogs or other pets.
  - c. Also, wash all clothes and shoes that were with your child on the day of exposure.



6. Contagiousness:
  - a. Poison ivy or oak is not contagious to others.
  - b. The fluid from the blisters or rash cannot cause poison ivy.
  - c. No need to miss any school or child care.
7. Expected Course: Usually lasts 2 weeks. Treatment reduces the severity of symptoms, not how long they last.

## When To Call

### *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

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2011) at [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

