

FACT SHEET

POISON IVY / POISON OAK / POISON SUMAC

What are poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac?

During the summer people come in contact with noxious oil from one of these plants:

- **Poison ivy** has 3 shiny leaves and can grow as a shrub, vine or small plant. It grows in all parts of the country.
- **Poison oak** also has 3 shiny leaves but grows primarily in California and Western states.
- **Poison sumac** has 7 to 13 paired leaves on each stem and looks like a woody shrub or tree. It grows in eastern states.

What are the symptoms?

Poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac all cause the same kind of rash. The rash usually begins 1-2 days after skin contact and may be itchy with small blisters.

How is it spread?

Contact with the oil from the plants is the only way to get the reaction. The fluid in the blisters **DOES NOT** cause the rash to spread. The oil may remain on a child's hands, under fingernails, and on any articles of clothing worn when the child touched the plant. Contact with the oil on these surfaces can make new rash appear.

What can parents and child care providers do?

- Prevent contact with the plants that have the noxious oil. Get rid of the oil from the plant. Wash the affected skin area with soap and water for 10 minutes. Launder clothes and sneakers. Bathe pets that may have touched the plants, so they do not spread the oil to humans.
- If the rash is mild, apply calamine lotion or over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream as directed by the manufacturer of these medications. Treatment makes the child feel better, but symptoms will usually last for 2 weeks.
- **Seek medical attention immediately if** the child has a rash on the face with swelling of eye lids or lips, a red face or is coughing after breathing the smoke from burning poisonous plants, the rash is widespread, or the child has had a severe reaction in the past.

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