

Nurses' Nook...Poison ivy myths and facts

Poison ivy rash is quite prevalent right now and is a specific contact dermatitis caused by contact with the sticky oil that the plant contains called urushiol. This oil is in the stem, leaves, and roots of the plants poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. Skin contact with the plant or with a part of your body or a pet's body that has the oil on it can cause the rash. Wearing protective clothing when outdoors can help keep the oil off of your skin. Washing your skin thoroughly as soon as possible after contact is thought to help.

The rash develops within a few days of contact and usually lasts a few weeks and is intensely itchy. It is generally self-limiting but you should contact your physician if:

- The reaction is severe or widespread
- You inhaled the smoke from burning poison ivy and are having difficulty breathing
- Your skin continues to swell
- The rash affects your eyes, mouth or genitals
- Blisters are oozing pus
- You develop a fever greater than 100 F (37.8 C)
- The rash doesn't get better within a few weeks (Mayo Clinic, 2018)

Here are some common myths about poison ivy:

1. The rash is contagious - poison ivy is not spread from one person to another. It is caused by contact with the urushiol oil.
2. The rash can be spread by scratching - it does not spread from one area to another on your body as it is caused by contact with the urushiol. However different areas on your body may exhibit the rash at different times depending on the toughness of the skin and the amount of urushiol exposure
3. Dead poison ivy plants are no longer toxic - if they still contain urushiol they are still a problem. Remember it is contained in the leaves, *stems and roots*.

As always please ask the nurse in your child's school if you have a question.

Please note that all of the school nurse offices in the district have medication disposal packs available for FREE for you to safely dispose of unused medication. In addition most medication can be disposed of at your local police station.