



TO YOUR GOOD HEALTH BY DR. PAUL G. DONOHUE

Poison-ivy facts

QI own a lawn service, and every year I catch poison ivy. Would you answer some questions my crew and I have? Can a person give it to another? What part of the plant gives it to you? What does poison ivy look like? What's the best treatment? — W.N.

AThe sap of the poison-ivy plant (or poison oak or poison sumac) is the stuff that causes poison-ivy rash. It comes from the leaves, stem or roots of the plant if they are broken and are leaking sap.

The first contact with sap doesn't cause an outbreak, but it sensitizes a person. Upon the next exposure, he or she will break out in a rash one to two days (the range is six hours to 12 days) after getting sap on the skin. At first, the rash is nothing more than itchy, red lines, but soon blisters appear. The rash lasts about three weeks.

Blister fluid does not spread the rash to others, so poison ivy is not spread from person to person. Only sap spreads it. The sap can cling to clothing, pets and tools, so contact with sap-covered objects can spread the rash.

The poison ivy plant has oak-

leaf-like, green leaves in clusters of three. That's a poor description. The best way to familiarize yourself with how it looks is to get hold of a picture of it. You can find one in your local library. Furthermore, the plant's appearance varies in different locations. You can test a suspect plant by first putting on vinyl gloves and then putting the end of a leaf stalk on white paper. Crush the stalk with a stone to release sap. If the plant is poison ivy, the sap will turn brown in about 10 minutes.

Washing as soon as possible after exposure can prevent the rash, but you have to act fast — 15 to 30 minutes is all the leeway you have. Barrier creams like **IvyBlock** or Stokogard Outdoor provide some protection.

Cool compresses saturated with plain water or Burow's solution relieve the itch, as do lotions like calamine lotion. When the rash is not localized to one or two spots, tepid baths with colloidal oatmeal or cornstarch stop itchiness. Cortisone skin creams and lotions also work. In extensive and serious outbreaks, oral cortisone is prescribed.

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