



MAFES Dawg Tracks

June 15, 2015



Safety Tips: Protection from Poison Oak, Ivy and Sumac



Poison Ivy, Oak and Sumac are the most common allergens in the USA. According to the Poison Ivy Information Center, approximately 1/2 of all citizens of our population will suffer from one of these three. About 15% of our 120 million Americans that are allergic to poison ivy, oak or sumac are so highly sensitive that they can break out in a rash and begin to swell in 4 to 12 hours instead of the normal the 12 to 24 hours.

A rash from Poison Ivy, Oak or Sumac is caused by an oil found in these plants called urushoil. When the oil touches the skin, it often causes an itchy, blistering rash. Most people can treat the rash at home.

However, if you experience any of the following symptoms, go to the emergency room immediately:

- Trouble breathing or swallowing
- The rash covers most of the body
- You have rashes or blisters
- You experience swelling, especially of an eyelid swells shut
- The rash develops on your face or genitals
- Much of your skin itches, or nothing seems to ease the itch.

If you do not have any of the above symptoms, and the rash appears on a small area of your skin, and you are absolutely certain that the rash is either poison, ivy, oak or sumac, you may be able to treat at home.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOME TREATING OF POISON IVY, OAK OR SUMAC-

- ✓ **Immediately rinse the skin with lukewarm, soapy water.** If you can rinse the skin immediately after touching the ivy, oak or sumac, you might possibly rinse off some of the poison. If not washed off the oil will spread from person to person and to other areas of the body.
- ✓ **Wash your clothing.** Thoroughly wash all the clothing you had on when you contacted the poison ivy, oak or sumac. The oil can stick to your clothing, and if it touches the skin, it can cause another rash.
- ✓ **Wash everything that may have oil on the surface.** Besides the clothing, the oil from the poison oak, ivy, or sumac can stick to many surfaces, including golf clubs, garden tools, leashes and even a pet's fur. Be sure to rinse the pet's fur, tools and or any other objects that have contacted the poison ivy, oak or sumac with warm, soapy water.
- ✓ **Do not scratch – scratching causes infection.**
- ✓ **Leave blisters alone.** If blisters open, do not remove the overlying skin, as the skin can protect the raw wound underneath and prevent infection.

- ✓ **Take short, lukewarm baths.** To ease the itch, take short lukewarm baths in a colloidal oatmeal preparation. You can buy this at drugstores, and you can also take a cool shower that will help a little.
- ✓ **Consider using calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream.** Apply calamine lotion to the itching areas. If you have only mild cases of the allergy you can use hydrocortisone cream or lotion that will help.
- ✓ **Consider taking antihistamine pills.** These pills will help to stop the itching. Use these cautiously. In other words don't get them on your skin - doing so can worsen the rash or the itch.
- ✓ **If your rash is not better after 7 to 10 days or you think that it might be infected, you should go to a dermatologist. The dermatologist can treat the rash or infection and reduce the itch.**

PREVENTING A RASH FROM POISON OAK, IVY, OR SUMAC-

- Avoid these poisonous plants.
- Protect your skin.

Identifying Poison Ivy-

- Each leaf has 3 small leaflets
- It grows as a shrub (low woody plant) in far north USA, Canada and around the Great Lakes.
- In Spring, it grows yellow green berries.
- It may have green berries that turn white in early Fall.

Identifying Poison Oak-

- Each leaf has three small leaflets.
- It most often grows as a shrub.
- It grows as a vine.
- It may have yellow-white berries.

Identifying Poison Sumac-

- Leaves have a row of paired leaflets and a small leaf at the end.
- It grows as tall shrub or small tree.
- In the Northeast and the Midwest, it grows in standing water or peat bogs. In the Southeast, it grows in swampy areas.
- Leaves have blotches that look like back spots. The spots are urushoil, when exposed to air turn a brownish black. Before the urushoil hits the air, it is clear or a pale yellow.
- It may have yellow-white berries.

TIPS FOR SKIN PROTECTION-

Sometimes it is hard to avoid these plants; if you find yourself in this predicament, follow these tips:

- ✓ **Use a skin-care product called an ivy block barrier** – The product contains bentoquatam which blocks the urushoil from penetrating the skin and should be applied before you go outdoors.
- ✓ **Wear long pants, long sleeve shirts, boots and gloves.**
- ✓ **All parts of these plants contain urushoil.**
- ✓ **Touching anything that has urushoil on it can cause an allergic reaction.**

**IF THE LEAVES LOOK SUSPICIOUS
DON'T TOUCH & GET OUT OF
"DODGE"**