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Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, and Poison Sumac

Description

Your child has extremely itchy streaks or patches of redness and blisters on exposed body surfaces (such as the hands).

The rash appears 1-4 days after your child was playing outside.

Cause

Poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac cause the same type of rash and are found throughout North America. More than 50% of people are sensitive to the oil of these plants. Most children do not know they have come in contact with the oil of these plants.

Your child may have chased after a baseball that rolled into a patch of poison ivy, climbed a tree with poison oak, or hiked in the woods filled with poison sumac. Any part of the body that comes in contact with the oil from these plants will develop a rash. Areas of the body that come in contact with more oil may develop a more intense rash. Once the oil is washed off, the poison can no longer be spread.

Expected Course

The rash usually lasts 2 weeks. The sores should be dried up and no longer itch in 10 to 14 days. Treatment reduces the symptoms, but does not cure the rash. The best approach is prevention.

Home Treatment

Cool soaks - Soak the area with the rash in cold water or massage it with an ice cube for 20 minutes as often as necessary. Let it air dry after the soaking or massage. This will reduce itching.

Steroid cream

- If applied early, a steroid cream can reduce the itching. Start with OTC 1% hydrocortisone cream. It can be applied 4 times per day for 2 weeks. If this does not help, stronger steroid creams can be prescribed.
- If the rash causes significant swelling around your child's eyes, steroids, given orally, may be necessary.

- In the meantime, cut your child's fingernails short and encourage your child not to scratch the rash.

Benedryl elixer (12.5 mg/tsp) is OTC and can be given every 4 hours to help control itching. The dose is ¼-1/2 teaspoon for every 10 pounds up to a maximum of 2 teaspoons.

Caledryl lotion (clear) can be applied directly to the rash every 4 hours for relief of itching.

Itch-X comes in a spray bottle and can be sprayed on the rash to control itching.

Contagiousness

The fluid from the sores is not contagious. However, oil or sap from the poisonous plant may remain on a pet's fur or on items such as clothing or shoes. The oil or sap is contagious for about a week. Be sure to wash it off clothes or pets with soap and water.

Prevention

Learn to recognize these plants. Poison ivy grows in all regions of North America. Poison oak grows in western North America and the southeastern region of the U.S. To be safe, avoid all plants with three large green leaves on each stem. Another clue is shiny black spots on damaged leaves. The plant sap turns black when exposed to air.

Poison sumac has 7 to 13 leaves per stem, grows in swamps in the southeast U.S., and is harder to recognize.

If you think your child has had contact with one of these plants, wash the exposed areas of skin immediately with any available soap. This will lessen the reaction your child will develop.

Everyone should wear long pants or socks when walking through woods that may contain poison ivy, oak, or sumac.

Call our office if:

- The itching becomes severe, even with treatment.
- Your child's eyes are swelling shut.
- The rash looks infected (you see pus or crusty, yellow scabs).
- The rash lasts longer than 2 weeks.
- You have other concerns or questions.

This information should not be used as substitute for the medical care and advice of your child's physician. Health related topics found on the Andorra Pediatrics web site should not be used for diagnosing purposes or be substituted for medical advice. As with any new or ongoing treatment, always consult your professional healthcare provider before making any changes in treatment or beginning any new treatment. If you have any questions or concerns, please call our office.