

## SUMMER 2009

### CENTER FOR PHARMACY CARE SERVICES

The Center for Pharmacy Care, now located at 1000 Fifth Avenue, in the Muldoon Building, offers the following complimentary screenings and services every week day.

- Bone density
- Body composition analysis
- Facial skin analysis
- Serum glucose and A1C testing for diabetes & Living My Life®
- Cholesterol screening
- Tobacco Cessation Program
- Health Care Coaching
- Medication Therapy Management
- Anemia Screening

Please call for an appointment: x5874.

Hours: Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.



### Blood Pressure Screening

- June 10 & 24
  - July 8 & 22
  - August 12 & 26
- 10:00 a.m.-noon  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Duquesne Union

No appointment necessary.

## POISON IVY: Watch for Leaves of Three

**U**rushiol, a chemical contained in poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac, is an oily resin that produces the dreaded signs and symptoms of itching, rash, redness, swelling and even blisters upon contact with the skin. Medically, the skin condition is referred to as a type of *contact dermatitis*. These plants are currently included in the genus known as *Toxicodendron* ("poison tree"). Approximately 20% to 40% of the population is not susceptible to this reaction, but, for others, the local effects can vary from mild redness and itching to extensive blistering and extreme pain.

Urushiol can be spread year-round via direct exposure (touching one of the plants), indirect contact (oil left on pets or clothing), or airborne inhalation (breathing plant particles when burned or mowed). It typically requires about ten minutes for urushiol to be absorbed, followed by skin signs that develop 12 to 48 hours after contact, thus the basis for its categorization as a *delayed* reaction. Urushiol may remain on clothing and other inanimate objects for extended periods of time. It is important to note that the *rash* caused by these plants is not contagious,

therefore, it cannot be spread by contact with another person who has poison ivy.

### HOW CAN I DETERMINE WHETHER A PLANT IS POISON IVY, OAK OR SUMAC?

Each of these plants has characteristic features that distinguish them from other vegetation.

**Poison ivy**, many times found in damp, wooded, or rocky areas, consists of leaves grouped in three. Even though it is often referred to as the green, three-leaved plant with toothed edges, some species can differ in color, shape, and edges. Some varieties even possess white berries. Poison ivy, like deciduous trees, changes its leaf color throughout the seasons.

**Poison oak** also contains leaves in groups of three; however, they differ in appearance and may have a fuzzy texture. They often resemble the leaves of the oak tree. In the eastern part of the United States, poison oak usually grows low to the ground and can resemble a bush.

**Poison sumac** differs from poison ivy and poison oak in that its leaves are grouped in numbers ranging from seven to 13 and possess smooth edges.



Poison Ivy

photo by: cygnus921

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cygnus921/2580194923/>

(accessed 14 April 2009)



Poison Oak

photo by: goingslo

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/goingslo/2754721297/>

(accessed 14 April 2009)



Poison Sumac

photo by: RickKarr

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/rickkarr/223628593/>

(accessed 14 April 2009)

# POISON IVY: Watch for Leaves of Three

## WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT POISON IVY?

There are several products marketed for the prevention of the contact dermatitis associated with poison ivy, oak or sumac. IvyBlock® is a lotion containing the chemical bentoquatam that is used similarly to sun blockers. It is applied 15 minutes before going outdoors and absorbs urushiol before it can come in contact with the skin. It provides protection for about four hours, therefore, re-application is recommended if exposure exceeds this period.

Products like IvyCleanse® (towelettes) and Tecnu® (liquid cleanser) are used to remove oil from either the skin or other sources (e.g., clothing, shoes, and tools). Tecnu® can also be used to wash any pets that may have come in contact with the oil. Since the skin absorbs urushiol within 10 minutes, it is important to remember that these products must be used within 15 minutes of contact in order to be effective.

## IS THERE ANY WAY TO RELIEVE THE ITCHING?

Oatmeal preparations (Aveeno® and related products) can be very helpful in relieving itchy and irritated skin. They can be added to bath water or applied as a body wash, cream or lotion.

Antihistamines are used to combat many allergic reactions and may be helpful to

decrease the itching that occurs after contact with plants of this species. There are two types of antihistamines. The older variety can produce some degree of sleepiness, while the newer compounds are non-sedating. Diphenhydramine (Benadryl®, etc.) is a sedating antihistamine and can be very beneficial for the individual having difficulty sleeping at night. Its sedating properties can be troublesome if the drug is used during daytime hours and multiple daily doses may be required. Loratadine (Claritin®, etc.) and cetirizine (Zyrtec®, etc.) are alternative antihistamines that can be administered once daily. Loratadine does not produce sedation while cetirizine may result in sleepiness in occasional patients. These drugs may be preferred in patients who require relief from itching, but must be alert during normal working hours. The three antihistamines mentioned above are available as nonprescription or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. Their generic versions are equally effective and significantly lower in cost.

## HOW CAN I TREAT THE SKIN REACTIONS CAUSED BY TOXICODENDRON SPECIES?

If an individual already has signs of urushiol-induced dermatitis, a number of preparations can be used to reduce the severity of the reaction. Ivy-Dry® (combination of zinc and benzyl alcohol) helps to decrease itching (pruritus) and redness associated with the rash. It also adsorbs moisture and limits weeping from the blisters. IvySoothe® (hydrocortisone cream 1%) and similar OTC products can effectively reduce inflammation and itching. Calamine, a longtime ingredient in many lotions, can also decrease itching and inflammation and serves as a barrier to protect the skin. Zanol® can be useful in removing toxin from the skin and enhancing the recovery process. It may be applied to any area of the body and reduces itching and pain within 30 seconds after application. This agent may be used before or after appearance of the rash.

## WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR?

There are certain situations where the home treatment of rash is not recommended. These include:

- Severe or widespread (covers greater than a quarter of the body's surface) rash;
- Rash affecting the eyes, mouth, or genitals;
- The presence of blisters that are oozing pus;
- Existence of soft yellow scabs or areas that are extremely tender;
- A fever of greater than 100°F accompanying the rash;
- Symptoms worsening at night or interrupting sleep;
- Failure of the rash to improve within a few days or heal within two weeks.

Physicians may prescribe oral or injectable corticosteroids to expedite healing of the rash and decrease the risk of infection. Prednisone and similar drugs (e.g. Medrol®, etc.) are often prescribed in the form of *dosepaks* for the short-term treatment (six days) of more severe forms of poison ivy. Many physicians believe that *dosepaks* may produce inadequate healing rates in very severe forms of the dermatitis and prefer to extend treatment with these drugs for a total of 14 to 21 days. Patients must be careful to understand and follow physician instructions when taking all courses of corticosteroid therapy. The drug should be taken with food to decrease gastrointestinal disturbances such as nausea, vomiting and upset stomach.

Poison ivy and other forms of urushiol-induced dermatitis can be extremely disabling. Many products are available for self-treatment, but the patient must recognize when medical attention is necessary.



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For more information on poison ivy, please visit the following Web sites:

- [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/poisonivyoakandsumac.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/poisonivyoakandsumac.html)
- [www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/poisonivy090208.html](http://www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/poisonivy090208.html)
- [www.mayoclinic.com/health/poison-ivy/DS00774](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/poison-ivy/DS00774)

[www.duq.edu/pharmacy](http://www.duq.edu/pharmacy)