



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Environmental Health and Safety Office

InfoSafetyBulletin (June-GB)



POISON IVY has shiny green leaves in groups of three with white waxy berries that birds love. In the early spring & fall the leaves are red. Many a bouquet of these beautiful leaves have graced the tables of unsuspecting campers! It looks pretty but 85% of humans are allergic to the Urushiol, a sticky oil, on its leaves. This oil can remain in clothing or on shoes for up to 5 years!

Poison Ivy was once known as “the 7 year itch” as people get it year after year. Why? Some people have special gardening shoes they only use in summer. Perhaps they put on shoes that have had urushio oil on them from past year’s exposure. Perhaps they pick it up from their children’s shoes or toys that have oil on them. Many Moms get it doing laundry drenched in poison ivy and left lying in a hamper! If your pet has been running around in the bush and picking up urushio, you will need to bathe him. If he has the oil on his fur and rubs up against you or you pet him, you might end up with a bout of poison ivy. Wear protective clothing when washing your pet to avoid the oils. Be sure to wash your hands when you are done.

Do not bathe if you may have been exposed to poison ivy. Shower off the oils. Oils float on top of water & sticks to you when you stand up! Don’t forget to wash anything that might have oil on it; shoes, jewelry, equipment or tools.

Manitoba is full of poison ivy. If you go into the bush, wear protective clothing. Take clothing off and put into the washing machine immediately. Then wash carefully. Use oil free soap. Sunlight soap should be a “must” on camping trips!

Got Poison Ivy in your yard? Don’t burn it! Burning releases oil soaked smoke & dust particles into the air. This can cause serious illness when inhaled. Use herbicides (Roundup) to kill poison ivy. (Use product carefully following package directions to protect yourself). Be aware herbicides kill any plant it contacts. Pulling & digging it up is not effective. Rhizomes run underground & it will show up again next year. Also, you risk getting it on your skin.

Should you be exposed, rashes can form in 9 days but on repeat exposure a rash may form as quickly as in 1 or 2 days. The skin gets red, itchy, swells & groups of watery blisters form. This rash appears in streaks because as you walk past leaves, they drag across your skin leaving a streak of oil. Only the oil can cause a contact rash. Blisters are not contagious. You can’t get poison ivy from open oozing sores. Scratching will not spread the ivy rash but it can spread an infection if the rash gets infected with bacteria.

First aid for rash, itch & blisters is frequent baths, using colloidal oatmeal or cool compresses or diluted aluminum acetate solution, such as Burrow’s solution, or calamine lotion. Jewelweed (*Impatiens biflora*) is a folk remedy that works. A tincture can be made by boiling the leaves & stems in water for 20 minutes, & then straining and apply to rash when cooled. Try rinsing affected areas with apple cider vinegar or witch hazel to ease itching. Do not use topical creams. They may cause an allergic reaction making matters much worse. Expose rash to air to dry when possible. Serious symptoms like facial or body swelling, confusion, difficulty breathing are medical emergencies. Get to a doctor immediately! Some allergic reactions can be life threatening.