

Poison Ivy, Poison Oak and Poison Sumac

What is Poison Ivy, Poison Oak and Poison Sumac?

Poison ivy, oak and sumac are plants that may cause a skin rash in people who come in direct contact with them.

Plant	Found In	Description
Poison Ivy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every province except Newfoundland • Most common in southern Quebec and Southern Ontario • Grows along water edges, and near wooded areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A perennial that can grow as a trailing or climbing vine or a small shrub • Each leaf has three almond-shaped leaflets • The stalk of the middle leaf is much larger than those of the other two • Leaflets have pointed tips • Leaf colour ranges from light green (usually the younger leaves) to dark green (mature leaves), turning bright red in the fall • Has yellowish-or greenish-white flowers that blossom from May to July and are often hidden by the leaves
Poison Oak 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rare in Canada • Grows in a few remote areas on the east coast of Vancouver Island and nearby islands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to poison ivy but leaflets have rounded tips
Poison Sumac 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wooded swamps of southern Ontario and southern Quebec 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tall shrub or small tree with 7 to 15 leaflets arranged in pairs and one more leaflet at the end • Flowers are greenish, in loose clusters 3 to 8 inches long. The fruits are not quite spherical, gray flattened and about 0.2 inches across. • Far more serious reaction than if exposed to poison ivy or poison oak

Symptoms of Poison Ivy, Poison Oak and Poison Sumac

Symptoms usually develop within 24 to 48 hours after contact. At first, there may be severe itching of the skin which soon becomes red and inflamed. Swelling, blistering and discharge may also occur. The rash can last 10 days up to four weeks.

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca



Causes of the Rash

The rash is an allergic reaction to urushiol, a colourless or pale yellow oil that oozes from any cut or crushed part of the plant, including the roots, stems and leaves. After exposure to air, urushiol turns brownish black, making it easier to spot.

You can come in contact with urushiol in one of three ways:

1. Direct contact - touching the plant's sap
2. Indirect contact - touching something that has come in contact with the plant's sap, such as animal fur, garden tools or sports equipment
3. Airborne - urushiol particles, such as from burning plants, may come in contact with your skin

Is the rash contagious?

No. The rash cannot pass from person to person. However, urushiol (the oil from the plant) can spread by direct contact from person to person.

Treating Poison Ivy, Poison Oak and Poison Sumac

If you think you have been in contact with poison ivy, oak or sumac, follow these steps:

- Wash all exposed areas with mild soap and cold running water immediately
- Wash clothing with soap or detergent with protective gloves
- Relieve the itching of mild rashes by taking a cold shower and then apply over-the-counter preparations (e.g., calamine lotion)
- Antihistamines, if taken soon after exposure and continued for two or three days, usually help reduce the intensity of the body's reaction
- Relieve the itching by also soaking in a lukewarm bath with an oatmeal or baking soda. This may dry out oozing blisters.
- See your doctor for prescription cortisone in severe cases. Over the counter hydrocortisone creams are not strong enough to reduce poison ivy rashes.
- Avoid scratching the blisters to reduce the risk of infection

Preventing Poison Ivy, Poison Oak and Poison Sumac

- Keep yourself covered outdoors
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly
- Avoid contact by learning to recognize poison ivy, oak and sumac (e.g., poison ivy: "leaves of three let them be")
- Destroy poison ivy and oak growing around your house, either chemically or by physically removing the plants. Do not burn them.

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