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/ **Poison ivy, oak, and sumac: How to treat the rash**

# POISON IVY, OAK, AND SUMAC: HOW TO TREAT THE RASH



What should I do if I touch a plant? What does the rash look like? When does the rash appear? How do I treat the rash? Who gets a rash, and is it contagious? How can I prevent a rash? Where do these plants grow?



Tips for treating poison ivy



## Tips for treating poison ivy

A rash from poison ivy, poison oak or poison sumac is caused by an oil found in these plants called urushiol. When this oil touches your skin, it often causes an itchy, blistering rash. Most people can safely treat the rash at home.



### Caution

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If you have any of the following, go to the emergency room immediately:

- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- A rash around one or both eyes, your mouth, or on your genitals
- Swelling on your face, especially if an eye swells shut
- Itching that worsens or makes it impossible to sleep
- Rashes on most of your body
- A fever

These are signs of a severe reaction that require immediate medical care.

You can treat the rash at home if you:

- Have a mild rash
- Developed a rash on a small section of skin
- Are certain that the rash is due to poison ivy, oak, or sumac

To treat a mild rash and help stop the itch, dermatologists recommend the following:

**To treat the rash**

- **Immediately rinse your skin with lukewarm, soapy water.** If you can rinse your skin immediately after touching poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac, you may be able to rinse off some of the oil. If not washed off, the oil can spread from person to person and to other areas of your body.
- **Wash your clothing.** Thoroughly wash all of the clothes you were wearing when you came into contact with the poisonous plant. The oil can stick to clothing, and if it touches your skin, it can cause another rash.



### Caution

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**To avoid getting oil from the plant on your skin, wear gloves while touching your clothes, even when taking off your clothes.**

- **Wash everything that may have the oil on its surface.** Besides clothing, the oil from poison ivy, oak, and sumac can stick to many surfaces, including gardening tools, golf clubs, leashes and even a pet's fur. Be sure to rinse your pet's fur, and wash tools and other objects with warm, soapy water.



### Caution

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**To avoid getting any oil from the plant on your skin, wear gloves while touching or washing anything that may have oil on it. This includes your pet. If you need to wash your pet, wear gloves.**

- **Do not scratch, as scratching can cause an 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.

### What can relieve the itch?

- **Take short, lukewarm baths.** To ease the itch, take short, lukewarm baths in a colloidal oatmeal preparation, which you can buy at your local drugstore. You can also draw a bath and add one cup of baking soda to the running water. Taking short, cool showers may also help.
- **Use calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream.** Calamine lotion can reduce the itch. If you have a mild case, a hydrocortisone cream or lotion is another treatment that can alleviate the itch.
- **Apply cool compresses to the itchy skin.** You can make a cool compress by wetting a clean washcloth with cold water and wringing it out so that it does not drip. Then, apply the cool cloth to the itchy skin.
- **Consider taking antihistamine pills.** These pills can help reduce itching. You should not apply an antihistamine to your skin, as doing so can worsen the rash and the itch.

If your rash is not improving after 7 to 10 days, or you think your rash may be infected, [see a board-certified dermatologist](#). A dermatologist can treat your rash and any infection and help relieve the itch.

Dermatologists emphasize that you only treat the rash if you're absolutely certain that poison ivy, oak, or sumac caused it. If you've never had a poison ivy rash, see a doctor for a diagnosis.

You'll find pictures of what the rash can look like at: [Poison ivy, oak, or sumac: What does the rash look like?](#)

### Have a skin, hair, or nail problem?

Discover the benefits of seeing a dermatologist.

What is a dermatologist?

