

Poison Oak, Ivy and Sumac Information

tecnu

Information presented by
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Urushiol (say OOH-ROO-SHEE-ALL)

Urushiol is a substance in every fiber of the poison oak/ivy/sumac plants that is amazingly potent and will cause a rash to break out in approximately 75% of the population if it gets on the skin. If a person can remove it within hours, he or she can actually avoid the rash, or at least dramatically reduce the severity of the rash. Generally speaking, the sooner one can get the oil off the skin, the better the chance of avoiding the rash.

Is Urushiol an Oil or Resin?

The substance urushiol is commonly referred to as a type of oil. However, it is actually more like a resin. When it gets on the skin it binds with the proteins in the skin after about 10 minutes and becomes very, very difficult to get off. At that point a normal shower actually tends to spread the rash causing oil, urushiol. Until the urushiol is removed, it can be transferred to towels, bed sheets, steering wheels, tools, etc.

How potent is urushiol?

Urushiol, which causes the rash, is amazingly potent. Basically, the smallest amount you could measure would be enough to start the rash. An amount the size of the tip of a needle is enough to start and spread the rash. Indications are that urushiol would have to be diluted down to 1 part urushiol to 60,000 parts olive oil before its potency was lost.

How can urushiol spread?

Touching the plants, even if the plants are dead and even in the winter months, can spread urushiol. Urushiol can be spread if a person burns the plants and comes in contact with the smoke. Wildfire fire fighters suffer tremendously from poison ivy/oak because they are continually in smoke that has particles of urushiol in it. Urushiol can be spread if a person gets the resin on his or her clothing and then someone else comes in contact with the clothing. This is how spouses can end up getting the rash. Be careful with contaminated clothing. Urushiol also gets on tools and pets and can be spread that way, as well. Ironically, touching someone that has urushiol on his or her skin is a very unlikely way to spread the oil. That's because, as mentioned earlier, the urushiol binds with a person's skin and is very difficult to get off. However, when a person scratches the infected rash area and then scratches somewhere else, he or she can continue to spread the rash in that manner.

How long does urushiol stay active or potent?

Urushiol has been shown to stay active for years. If a tool were contaminated with urushiol a person would need to remove the resin from the tool so that another worker would not get the rash after coming in contact with the same tool.

What is Tecnu and how do I use it on tools, gear and pets?

Tecnu is a special cleanser, originally developed during the cold war to remove radioactive fallout dust, that works to break the bond that urushiol has with the skin so that it can be rinsed off the skin with water. Tecnu is also a waterless cleanser, which means that a person can apply Tecnu and wipe it off with a cloth or paper towel—if water is not available. Tecnu removes pitch, creosote, adhesives, tar, and cable gel. Plus, Tecnu stays liquid in freezing temperatures. And it can be used on tools, outdoor gear and pets. For tools, wipe down with a cloth saturated with Tecnu, wait 2 minutes and rinse or wipe off. For gear, do the same as tools. If cleaning shoes, gloves and the like, test a small area for colorfastness. If okay, then saturate the item and rub the Tecnu around. After at least two minutes of contact, gently rinse the Tecnu off completely. For pets, simply apply Tecnu to the pet's fur, rub vigorously for two minutes and rinse thoroughly.

What can be done to cut down on the chances of getting the rash?

- 1) **Know what poison oak, ivy and sumac look like—then avoid it.** Of course, remember the “leaves of three, let it be” saying.
- 2) **Have Tecnu in your backpack, first aid kits or “on hand”** so that it is available as soon as possible after exposure to the poison plants. Obviously we make Tecnu, however, we are sincere when we say that using Tecnu early is the single most helpful thing one can do to avoid the rash if exposure has occurred. As stated above, the sooner the urushiol is removed, the better the chance of avoiding the rash completely.
- 3) **At the very least, wash your hands and forearms with Tecnu before leaving a location** if you think, or even suspect, you’ve been contaminated. It truly is better to be safe than sorry.
- 4) **If possible, apply Tecnu all over your body before you step into a shower.** Tecnu is applied to dry or unwetted skin. One does not get wet first. The reason for doing a full body application of Tecnu is that the urushiol could be on other parts of your body as a result of sweating, scratching, wiping your brow, removing a shirt, etc. The urushiol is invisible so you wouldn’t be able to see it on your body. Remember what was said earlier about the potency of urushiol.

How does one use Tecnu?

Tecnu is applied directly to dry or un-wetted skin. A person should rub Tecnu on fairly aggressively and make sure that it is in contact with the skin for two minutes. It should then be rinsed off or wiped off with a cloth if water is not available. It is best for a person to rinse the Tecnu off with a shower or running water, rather than a bath. If a person takes a bath, the urushiol that has been removed from the skin will be floating on the water and will re-attach when the person rises from the water.

What can be done after the rash starts?

In 2004 Tec Labs introduced a truly groundbreaking product called **Tecnu® Extreme**. It was developed for workers and individuals that have a chronic problem with getting the rash of poison ivy, oak and sumac. Tecnu Extreme is a unique, medicated exfoliating scrub that removes the rash causing urushiol from the skin. This is particularly helpful in two ways. First, a person can use Tecnu Extreme soon after exposure to **avoid the rash in the first place**. Secondly, if the rash has already started, he or she can use Tecnu Extreme to **stop the spreading immediately, plus stop the itching and start the healing process**. Ultimately, a person would want to use Tecnu Extreme at the earliest sign of the rash so that the rash can be stopped in its tracks. Original Tecnu can also help stop the rash from spreading, but the results from using Tecnu Extreme are quicker and more dramatic. Still, if Tecnu Extreme is not available, then use Original Tecnu and apply it over the entire body, as soon as the rash appears, and rinse off in a shower. Continue to use once daily for several days.

What have safety managers said about Tecnu?

“After we started using Tecnu our recorded cases of poison ivy dropped from fourteen to two.”

D.G. Safety Coordinator/American Electric Power

“Tecnu is the most amazing product on the market today for the treatment of poison oak/ivy. Our employees swear by it. During the months of active poison oak growth, our employees come in contact with the plant often. The days of lost time due to this are over. We notice a dramatic reduction of itch and redness almost immediately.”

John Reynolds, Senior Administrative Analyst, Jefferson County Roads and Transportation, Birmingham AL

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