**CAP health & wellness handout: Poison Ivy**

Many types of plants can cause an allergic reaction when ingested, touched or inhaled as smoke from burning dried matter. The most common exposures are to urushiol, the sap oil contained in poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac. These plants are poisonous year-round.

**Recognition:**

* Poison Ivy
  + Poison Ivy is found throughout the USA, except for in Alaska and Hawaii. It is also found on every continent.
  + Poison Ivy and Poison Oak have 3 leaves (see picture), while Poison Sumac has more.
  + Poison Ivy is by far the most common and can grow as a climbing vine, low spreading vine, or even a as a shrub.
  + “Leaves of three? Let it be”.
* Poison Oak
  + Most common in the western USA, but can be found in eastern states.
  + Leaves look very similar to Oak leaves.
  + It grows as a ground vine or shrub.
* Poison Sumac
  + Much less common than Poison Ivy or Poison Oak. Found primarily in wooded, swampy areas, mostly in the southeast.

**Exposure Symptoms:** Typically, a red, itchy skin rash with blisters forms over the exposed areas of skin within 12 – 72 hours of exposure. While the fluid in the blisters is NOT contagious, the rash can develop on different areas over several days.

**Treatment:**

* Cool, wet compresses, and oatmeal baths are soothing. Calamine lotion helps to dry up oozing areas. Non-prescription hydrocortisone cream can be very helpful.
* For smaller areas, heat (hot shower or hair dryer) can alleviate the itching for several hours.
* Most rashes will heal in 5 – 12 days.

**Prevention:**

* Be aware of your surroundings, know how to recognize poisonous plants
* Wear long sleeves and pants when working in dense vegetation.
* Wear gloves and eye protection if there is a possibility of accidental contact.
* Wash clothing (washing machine is sufficient) and tools (soap and water) after exposure
* Wash with soap and water, or TECNU if you are accidentally exposed to the oil. This must be done within 2 hours of exposure to be effective.