Poison Ivy - Myth vs. Fact

Poison ivy, oak and sumac belong to a family of plants that produce one of the most common allergic reactions in the United States. Experts estimate that 70% of the population is allergic to urushiol (yoo-roo-shhee-ol), the oil found in the sap of these plants. The reaction known as “urushiol-induced allergic contact dermatitis” occurs when urushiol attaches itself to skin after a person’s direct or indirect contact with the oil.

Myth: Scratching poison ivy blisters will spread the rash.
Fact: The fluid in the blisters will not spread the rash. After the first five minutes to two hours following exposure, neither scratching the skin nor skin-to-skin contact can spread the reaction. Before blisters form, the rash can only be spread by unbound urushiol. However, excessive scratching may cause infection because it allows bacteria from dirt on the hands or fingernails to enter the skin.

Myth: Poison ivy rash is "contagious."
Fact: Since poison ivy is an allergic reaction to urushiol, the only way to contract poison ivy is through direct contact with the plant; indirect contact by touching something that has urushiol on it (like a family pet or garden tool); or through airborne exposure to burning plants.

Myth: Once allergic, always allergic to poison ivy.
Fact: A person's sensitivity changes over time, even from season to season. Sensitivity to poison ivy tends to decline with age, as the body's immune system slows down.

Myth: Dead poison ivy plants are no longer toxic.
Fact: Urushiol remains active for up to five years in wet climates and nine years in dry climates. Never handle dead plants that look like poison ivy without proper protection.

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Resource: www.zanfel.com