



Pennridge Pediatric Associates

Pointers and Pearls

Summer 2007

TREATING THE IVY ITCH: WHEN KIDS ARE EXPOSED TO POISON IVY

More than 50% of people are sensitive to the leaves, stems, berries and roots of poison ivy, oak, sumac. An oil called urushiol is released when the poison ivy is "injured," and it sticks to skin and other objects. Although the resulting rash and blisters are not contagious, clothes and animals can spread the oily resin. Learn to identify poison ivy's telltale three leaves. The following tips will help you learn how to avoid, or treat the itch.

- When exposed, follow these steps:
 - Wash the skin with soap and water as soon as possible.
 - Clothes should be laundered several times. While animals are not likely to get poison ivy, they can spread the oils. If your pet was exposed, several baths are necessary.
 - Treat the rash. Your child may experience mild, localized redness and itching or have a more severe reaction that includes blisters and swelling over large portions of the body:
 - Calamine lotion (relieves itching, dries blisters) and hydrocortisone cream (reduces itching) help reduce itching and blistering.
 - A lukewarm water bath with an oatmeal product such as Aveeno, also may sooth the itch. Cool compresses can also help.
 - Contact us if your child has a severe case, especially if it involves the face or genitals. In these instances prescriptions for

oral and/or topical steroids may be prescribed. Another reason to contact us is if you think the rash has become infected.

CHILDREN AND THEIR DOGS

There's nothing cuter than a child and his dog. Pets offer children affection, companionship and the chance to learn responsibility. But they can also offer teeth and a trip to the emergency room. Each year, more than 4.7 million Americans are bitten by dogs. More than half are younger than 14. Most are bitten by their dog or one they know.



How to prepare for life with a dog
Before you bring a dog into the home:

- Because so many dog bites happen to young children, it is suggested that parents wait to get a dog until their children are older than 4 years of age.
- Don't buy a dog on a whim. Carefully consider the lifestyle change caring for a pet would incur, the amount of work it will take to properly train the pet, and if your child is ready for a furry friend.
- Choose the breed carefully. Ask a veterinarian for information about breed behavior and

suitability for a household with young children. For example, Collies and Labrador retrievers are breeds recommended as generally safe with children.

- Socialize your pet. Expose your puppy to a variety of people and other animals so it feels at ease in these situations; continue this exposure as your dog gets older.
 - Train your dog. Commands can build a bond of obedience and trust between your family and your dog. Hire a professional trainer if you need to, as a well-behaved dog is worth the investment. Avoid aggressive games like wrestling or tug-of-war with your dog.
 - Don't get a dog if you don't have the time for it. Dogs are social animals; spending time with it is important. Dogs that are frequently left alone are at higher risk for developing behavior problems.
 - Vaccinate your dog against rabies and other diseases; a sick dog can become aggressive.
 - Neuter your dog. "Fixed" dogs are three times less likely to bite.
 - Always keep your dog on a leash in public to control him.
 - Never leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- How to prepare your child for dog encounters in public places*
When in public places where there are dogs, teach your child to always ask the owner for permission before approaching the pet. Let the dog sniff your child, then have your child touch the dog gently, avoiding the face, head and tail.

- Teach your child not to bother a dog if it is sleeping, eating or caring for puppies.

- Tell your child not to run past a dog - chances are the dog will want to play "chase and catch."

- If your child feels threatened by a dog, instruct her to remain calm, not scream, avoid eye contact, and stand still or back away very slowly. If she is knocked down, she should curl into a ball and protect her face with her hands.

- If your child is bitten by a dog, seek medical attention and contact the dog's veterinarian to check vaccination records.

GET READY FOR SUMMER CAMP NOW AND HELP EASE

HOMESICKNESS LATER

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, more than 10 million children will head off to day camps and sleep over camps this summer. It's natural for children to feel homesick when they leave home for an extended period of time. Ninety percent of children experience some degree of homesickness when they spend time in an environment such as summer camps. Here are some tips for you to help prevent homesickness or decrease its severity, which will help your child more fully enjoy his or her experiences at summer camp:

- Involve your child in the decision. When your child feels that he or she has had even the smallest input in the decision to spend time away from home, it increases the perception of control. In contrast, feeling forced to leave home without input into the decision often increases the intensity of homesickness.

- Become familiar with the camp ahead of time. The more familiar your child is about the camp the less anxiety your child will feel about going.

- Talk to your child about what to expect. Let your child know that it's OK to feel homesick. Go over the details of what will happen at summer camp, what sort of activities are planned during the

day, and what mealtimes will be like so that your child knows what to expect.

- Mark off the days on a calendar. Show your child exactly the number of days he or she will be at camp so that your child knows that it's a finite time period with an end in sight. If you give a small calendar to your child, he or she can mark off the days and be comforted to know exactly when he or she will return home.

- Go through a practice separation. Have your child practice being away from home by spending a weekend at a friend's or relative's house. Instead of having your child call home, which has been shown to exacerbate homesickness, provide prestamped and addressed envelopes and writing paper so that he or she can practice writing letters home.

- Provide coping strategies. Let your child know that it's OK to feel homesick while away from home and help come up with some activities that would make him or her feel better. These activities can include looking at photos of family, writing a letter home, or writing about their feelings or drawing daily activities in a camp journal. Allow your child to take a favorite toy, book or CD to the summer camp to provide comfort and positive reminders of home.

- Be careful what you say. Don't express doubt or concern to your child about time away from home. You'll only exacerbate your child's homesickness with comments such as, "I sure hope the food there is decent," "I hope you'll be okay," or "Have a wonderful time. I hope I remember to feed your dog." Giving your child something to worry about will only increase the likelihood of he or she having preoccupying thoughts of home. Instead express enthusiasm and optimism about the upcoming event.

Summer camp should be a fun and memorable experience for your child. Experts advise that you avoid making "pick-up" arrangements in the event of

homesickness because these arrangements may undermine the child's confidence in his or her independence.

By carefully selecting a camp that is suited to your child's interests and preparing for the experience, you can help to increase the likelihood that your child will have a positive summer camp experience as they grow to become independent and well-adjusted people.

FROM THE SECRETARIES

A reminder for summer check ups Children playing middle and high school sports may have their PIAA form completed anytime after June 1st. Please make camp, school and sports exam appointments as soon as possible.

STUDIES AT PPA

Meningococcus is now the most common cause of life-threatening bacterial infections. We have two meningococcal vaccine studies in progress. One uses the same vaccine as the one currently recommended for all children at 11, 15, and 17 years of age. It will be given to infants at 9 months of age. The other study evaluates a meningococcal vaccine almost exactly like the licensed product in infants at 2 months of age (meningococcal infections are most common in children younger than 2 years of age).

A study of an already licensed medication to prevent wheezing episodes in children with asthma has begun. The purpose of the study is to see if the medication can be used at the time of an illness rather than every day as it is now used. The ages are 1 to 5 years of age.

If you have questions about any of these studies please call Bonnie Pforter, RN, Dr. Kratz or Dr. Rothstein at 215-257-2727.