

UAB Health Education

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

CONTACT DERMATITIS



Contact dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin due to exposure from an irritant or allergen. Many substances can cause this reaction, including cosmetics, soaps, jewelry and plants like poison ivy. It is not contagious or dangerous but can be very uncomfortable. Sometimes an obvious cause is identified but not always, and the condition can still be treated. If you avoid the trigger, the rash will usually clear up in two to four weeks.

SYMPTOMS

- Red rash which can include bumps and blisters, sometimes oozing and crusting
- Itchy skin
- Dry, cracked, scaly skin

DIAGNOSIS

Your provider will evaluate your exposure history and examine your skin. They may also recommend a patch test to identify if you are allergic to anything. During a patch test, small amounts of potential allergens are applied to adhesive patches placed on your skin. These remain in place for two to three days and then your provider will check for skin reactions.

TREATMENT

The first priority should be to avoid the offending agent. Several over-the-counter medications can relieve itching, including calamine lotion, hydrocortisone 1% cream or diphenhydramine (Benadryl). If these do not improve your symptoms or your rash is widespread, contact Student Health Services to discuss prescription treatment options.

RESOURCES

FamilyDoctor.org - Poison Ivy - <https://familydoctor.org/condition/poison-ivy/>

Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/contact-dermatitis/symptoms-causes/syc-20352742>

PREVENTION

- Avoid irritants and allergens
- Wash your skin and clothes immediately after you come into contact with an allergen
- Wear protective clothing
- Use moisturizer to keep your outer skin layer healthy
- Take care around pets (allergens from plants can cling to pets and then spread to people)