Poison Ivy Fatality Report



Dangers of burning poison ivy

The chill in the air makes this time of year prime time bonfire season, and here in Sportsman's Paradise: hunting season. But before you clear out the brush from your hunting camp or light any brush on fire, pay special attention to this warning on what you burn.

When Todd Taylor and his wife, Ashley, moved into a new home in Moss Bluff – the first step was to clear out some of the old brush. "We started raking up pine straw and we threw the pine straw onto the pile. We started trimming trees," he said.

Then the pile was set on fire. Todd kept an eye on it, inadvertently breathing in the smoke.

The next day, Todd's eyelids turned blood red. Then his health took a nose dive. "I start throwing up, I have chills, I'm running fever," he said.

Todd thought it might be a temporary virus, until his skin broke out. All over his body, painful, itchy rashes started popping up. "I've had some blisters in my eyebrows, irritation on my neck, all over my arms," he said.

Those symptoms were not new to this country boy that can recognize a reaction to poison ivy. "I know this is poison ivy. I've been down this road before, but my eyes were still kind of reddish," he said.

Todd decided to go to see a doctor. The diagnosis: systemic poison ivy. Imperial Health Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist Bridget Loehn explains, "Systemic poison ivy is an extreme allergic reaction to the oils from the poison ivy plant."

It was not physically touching the poison ivy plant that sickened Todd. It was breathing in the oils of the plant as it burned, traveling from the lungs to the blood stream.

Fortunately, Todd's case cleared up with steroids, allergy medicine and antihistamines. But Dr. Loehn says the symptoms can be life-threatening. "Symptoms of nausea, vomiting, fever, they can have swollen lymph nodes and even develop respiratory difficulties."

If you do not spend a lot of time in the woods, you may not know how to recognize poison ivy. Here is an easy way to remember: leaves of three, let it be. Vines with hair, beware!

“It’s just a good reminder to go look up pictures and be familiar with what poison ivy, poison oak, poison sumac looks like,” said Todd, “because it is very indigenous to the area.”

It is also important to note that even if you have burned poison ivy before and had no health problems, your neighbors could be affected by inhaling the burning plant’s oils.