



## Plants, Animals, and Insect Hazards in the Southeast

### POISONOUS PLANTS

#### What to Look for:

- **Poison Ivy** - Poison ivy grows as a shrub, vine or a small plant everywhere in the United States. It usually has 3 green shiny leaves, and may also have greenish-white flowers and clusters of berries.
- **Poison Oak** - Poison oak usually grows in shrubs, but can sometimes be found in vines. It is most common in the Southeast and Western United States. Poison oak always has three leaves and may also have greenish white flowers and clusters of berries.
- **Poison Sumac** - Poison sumac grows as a shrub or a tree ranging from 5-20 feet tall. It is most common in the eastern third of the United States. Branches of poison sumac usually contain nine leaves – four rows of two and one leaf at the end.



Poison Ivy

Poison Oak

Poison Sumac

#### What to Do:

**Avoiding Poisonous Plants** - Stay clear of small plants, vines, shrubs, or trees that look like poison ivy, oak, or sumac. To reduce the risk of coming in contact with poisonous plants:

- Wear proper clothing such as long pants and long sleeved shirts;
- Tuck your pant legs into your socks or boots;
- Tuck your shirt into your pants;
- Do not burn plants that may be poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac. Inhaling smoke from burning plants can cause severe allergic respiratory problems.

**Responding to Exposure and Treating Reactions** - If you come into contact with one of these plants, perform the following as soon as possible after contact:

- Remove contaminated clothing.
- Wash affected area of skin with soap and then rubbing alcohol, degreasing soap (such as dishwashing soap), or detergent, and lots of water.

If a mild rash develops:

- Apply a soothing lotion such as calamine lotion;

If the reaction is troublesome or if you have had previous severe reactions in similar situations seek medical care as soon as possible.



Poison ivy rash



## INSECT BITES

### What to Look for:

- Be observant of your surroundings for insect nests, spiders, flying wasps, bees, hornets, fire ants, mosquitoes, and ticks.

### What to Do:

#### Avoiding Insect Bites

- Wear proper clothing such as long pants and long sleeved shirts.
- Tuck pant legs into socks or boots, Tuck shirt into pants.
- Wear appropriate footwear that covers your entire foot (no sandals or flip-flops).

**Treating Insect Bites** - If stung or bitten by an insect, remove the stinger, if present, by scraping the edge of a credit card across the site.

- Wash the site with soap and water;
- Cover the site to keep it clean and apply a cold pack to the area to reduce pain and swelling;
- Monitor the site of the sting or bite; and

Seek medical attention immediately if there is a noticeable change in appearance (redness, swelling, discoloration).

## SPIDER BITES

### What to Look for:

Spiders are common in woodpiles, and in seldom used buildings or storage sheds.



**Black Widow**

**Brown Recluse**

**Hobo Spider**

### What to Do:

#### Avoiding Spider Bites

- Inspect or shake out any clothing, shoes, towels, or equipment before use.
- Wear protective clothing such as a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, hat, gloves, and boots when handling stacked or undisturbed piles of brush or wood.

**Treating Spider Bites** - Scouts should take the following steps if they are bitten by a spider:

- Stay calm. Identify the type of spider if it is possible to do so safely. Identification will aid in medical treatment.
- Send someone to notify your Scout Master or Adult Leader.
- Wash the bite area with soap and water.
- Apply a cloth dampened with cold water or filled with ice to the bite area to reduce swelling.
- **If the bite is from a recluse or hobo spider**, elevate the bite area if possible to reduce redness and swelling.
- **If the bite is from a black widow spider** maintain the bite area below the level of the heart if possible to minimize the flow of venom into the blood.



- DO NOT apply a tourniquet, it can cause more harm than good.
- DO NOT attempt to remove venom.
- Immediately seek professional medical attention.

## SNAKE BITES

### What to Look for:

Watch for snakes under rocks, brush, or items stored outdoors. Since it may be difficult to identify a venomous snake, **it is always best to treat all snakes as if they are venomous.**



**Copperhead**

**Cottonmouth /  
Water Moccasin**

**Rattlesnake**

### What to Do:

#### Avoiding Snake Bites

- **Never try to handle any snake.**
- Stay away from tall grass and piles of leaves when possible.
- Avoid climbing on rocks or piles of wood where a snake may be hiding.
- Be aware that snakes tend to be active at night and in warm weather.
- Wear boots and long pants when working or hiking in wilderness areas.

#### Treating Snake Bites - Scouts should take the following steps if they are bitten by a snake:

- Send someone to notify your Scoutmaster or Adult Leader immediately.
- Try to remember the color and shape of the snake, which can help with treatment of the snake bite.
- Keep still and calm. This can slow down the spread of venom.
- **Seek medical attention immediately.**
- Apply first aid if you cannot get to the hospital right away.
  - Lay or sit down with the bite below the level of the heart.
  - Wash the bite with soap and water.
  - Cover the bite with a clean, dry dressing.

#### Exercise CAUTION regarding snake bites

- Do not pick up the snake or try to trap it.
- Do not apply a tourniquet.
- Do not slash the wound with a knife.
- Do not suck out the venom.
- Do not apply ice or immerse the wound in water.
- Do not drink alcohol as a painkiller.
- Do not drink caffeinated beverages.



## WILD ANIMAL BITES and EXPOSURES

### What to look for:

Aside from the animal itself, look for droppings, footprints or nesting areas of the animal. Also be wary of animals acting strangely (excessive drooling, biting at everything or having trouble moving).

### What to do:

- Wild animals can carry diseases. Some of these diseases can cause illness in people. Diseases that can infect humans are caused by a wide range of viruses, fungi, bacteria, and parasites. Example diseases include hantavirus, histoplasmosis, lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus (LCMV) and cryptococcosis. Since wild animals can carry diseases that are dangerous to people, **direct contact with wildlife and their droppings should be avoided.**
- Examples of wild animals/rodents to avoid include rats, mice, bats, skunks, foxes, opossum, and raccoons.
- If bitten/scratched, get medical attention immediately.

## VECTOR BORNE DISEASES

"Vector-borne disease" is the term used to describe an illness caused by an infectious microbe that is transmitted by a blood-sucking insect from an infected vertebrate (e.g., bird, rodent, deer, or human) to a susceptible person. The vector-borne diseases that people are most familiar with are those that are transmitted by mosquitoes and ticks. Examples of vector borne diseases include *Lyme Disease* and *West Nile Fever*.



### What to look for:

Look for the insect that transmits the disease – most commonly mosquitoes or ticks.

### What to do:

#### Avoiding Blood-Sucking Insects That May Carry Vector-Borne Diseases

Protect yourself from the biting insects by using the following precautions:

- Use repellents to protect yourself against insect bites.
- Wear proper clothing such as long pants and long-sleeved shirts.
- Tuck pant legs into socks or boots.
- Tuck shirt into pants.



Lyme Disease  
"Target Rash"

#### Treating Blood-Sucking Insect Bites That May Carry Vector-Borne Diseases

- Wash and treat the area like you would for any other insect bite.
- Watch for signs of infection such as a "target rash" (Lyme Disease) or flu-like symptoms (West Nile).
- Seek medical attention if these symptoms persist.