Summer is coming up, and last year my children got into poison ivy. We had bad rashes to deal with. Any advice?

Poison ivy has the typical three leaves, and slightly reddish stalks. It grows as a weed, and the first thing you should do is teach the children to recognize it.

Our family has a cottage, and early in the spring we inspect for poison ivy. Rather than pulling it up, which gets the oil on gloves and clothing, we have spot sprayed with “Roundup.” By doing this we have eliminated it from our yard.

The burning of poison ivy can be extremely hazardous, because the oil vaporizes and can be inhaled and cause severe pneumonia. The oil in the plant can get on skin, where it causes a delayed hypersensitivity reaction. But it can also get on tools, clothing, pets, and then is secondarily transferred to the skin.

Any items possibly contaminated require cleansing with soap and water. Clothing should be thoroughly washed, and not with a load of uncontaminated clothes. Pets may need shampooing.

Recognized contact allows one to cleanse the skin, perhaps first with alcohol and then with soap and water.

The rash of poison ivy may be localized and itchy, but on occasion it becomes widespread. When large areas are affected, your doctor should be consulted, as medication may be required to suppress the rash and prevent secondary infection.

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While this column is provided as a service to our readers, Drs. Landless and Handysides unfortunately cannot enter into personal and private communication with our readers. We recommend that you consult with your personal physician on all matters of your health.