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DOH Cautions Residents in Monroe County to Avoid Exposure to Poisonous Plants



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Tallahassee, Fla. — As Monroe County works to recover from Hurricane Irma, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) is cautioning residents in the Florida Keys to avoid contact and smoke inhalation from poisonous plants when cleaning up storm debris, especially when burning leaves and trees.

Poisonwood (*Metopium Toxiferum*) is an evergreen shrub or tree that grows 25–35 feet tall in hammocks, pinelands and sandy areas near saltwater and is particularly abundant in the Florida Keys. Contact with this common Keys plant can cause reactions that range from nothing to a severe allergic reaction that may cause you to seek medical treatment. The tree has a spreading, rounded form with a short trunk and arching limbs with drooping branches. See pictures and more information [here](#).

Risk and tips to avoid Poisonwood exposure:

- Avoid direct contact with the plant or any tools or other materials that may have come in contact with the sap.
- Avoid inhalation of particles from burning plants.
- Your risk of having a reaction to Poisonwood and the severity of the reaction may depend on your age and the extent of the first contact or first few contacts with the plant.
- Other influences include physical activity and immune system function.
- Some studies have shown that how allergic you are may be inherited.

Symptoms:

- Itching, red streaks or general redness where the plant touched the skin.
- Blisters filled with fluid— in rare cases the blisters may be blood-filled and turn black.
- Severe symptoms include swelling of the neck, face, mouth, genitals, and eyelids – seek immediate medical attention.

Treatment:

- If you know that you've contacted the plant, wash the area with soap and water immediately. Sometimes the rash may be completely avoided if washed thoroughly within 10-15 minutes.
- Apply wet compresses or soak the area in cool water to relieve itching and help dry blisters.
- Antihistamine and calamine lotion may help relieve symptoms.
- If infection develops, seek medical attention.

For further information, please contact your local county health department or visit www.floridahealth.gov or www.FloridaDisaster.org.

During severe weather and other emergencies, you can count on active alerts from the department's official social media accounts. One of the fastest ways to receive official and accurate health-related information is to monitor [@HealthyFla](#) on Twitter and on [Facebook](#).

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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