

In the news

Same-sex marriages can resume in California next Wednesday unless a federal appeals court intervenes, the district judge who struck down the ban ruled. **A2.**

WikiLeaks said it was preparing to release the rest of its trove of secret Afghan war documents, drawing a Pentagon warning that lives would be put at risk. **A3.**

The Senate approved a \$600 million plan to beef up security at the Mexican border and sent the bill to President Obama, who will sign it today. **A12.**

State regulators fined former gubernatorial candidate Christy Mihos a record \$70,000 for using personal and corporate accounts to pay campaign expenses. **B1.**

Massachusetts retailers are promoting heavily and hoping for a surge this weekend, when the state will suspend its 6.25 percent sales tax. **B5.**

Pakistan appealed for food, medicine, and tents for the millions of people driven from their homes by floods. **A4.**

The summer's heat, fire, and flood emergencies fit the pattern of troubling climate change, the World Meteorological Organization said. **A18.**

Federal Aviation Administration computers remain vulnerable to sabotage despite upgrades, and no timetable exists to finish improvements, a government review found. **A14.**

Mayor Thomas M. Menino was knighted by the Italian government, an honor proposed by the consul general of Italy in Boston. **B1.**

Have a news tip? E-mail newstip@globe.com or call 617-929-TIPS (8477). Other contact information, **B2.**

POINT OF VIEW:
ROBERT KUTTNER

"For the most part, liberals are criticizing our president out of tough love. We dearly want him to succeed. For if he fails, we fail." **Opinion, A23.**

Inside

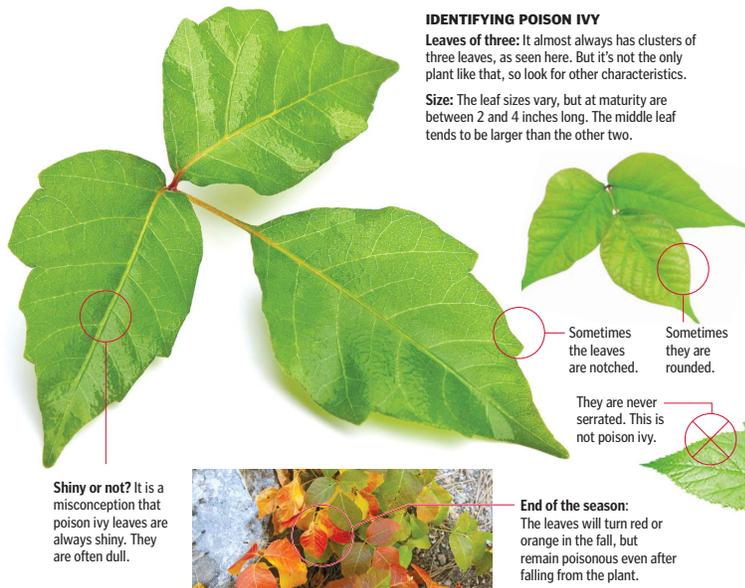
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Watch out, it's everywhere



IDENTIFYING POISON IVY

Leaves of three: It almost always has clusters of three leaves, as seen here. But it's not the only plant like that, so look for other characteristics.

Size: The leaf sizes vary, but at maturity are between 2 and 4 inches long. The middle leaf tends to be larger than the other two.

Sometimes the leaves are notched. Sometimes they are rounded.

They are never serrated. This is not poison ivy.

Shiny or not? It is a misconception that poison ivy leaves are always shiny. They are often dull.

End of the season: The leaves will turn red or orange in the fall, but remain poisonous even after falling from the plant.

HOW DO YOU GET IT?

Oil secreted by the plant causes an allergic reaction leading to itchy rashes of varying severity.

Direct contact: Touching any part of the plant with bare skin including leaves, stems, and roots.

Indirect contact: Don't touch anything that came in contact with the plants, like clothing or pets.

IF YOU TOUCH IT

Remove oils: Within an hour, rinse with lots of cold water. Do not use hot water initially. Try wiping exposed areas with alcohol.

Treatment: Rashes last up to three weeks. Anti-itch creams are available over the counter. See a doctor for severe rashes.

GETTING RID OF IT

Spray leaves with a strong herbicide or carefully cut the stem at the ground. Never yank the plant out by its roots, never use a weed whacker, and never burn it — the smoke is toxic.



SOURCES: University of Massachusetts; Jon Sachs, poison-ivy.org
DAVID SCHUTZ / GLOBE STAFF

POISON IVY, Page A20

Patients' files left at public dump

4 Mass. hospitals investigating

By Liz Kowalczyk
GLOBE STAFF

Four Massachusetts community hospitals are investigating how thousands of patient health records, some containing Social Security numbers and sensitive medical diagnoses, ended up in a pile at a public dump.

The shredded records included pathology reports with patients' names, addresses, and results of breast, bone, and skin cancer tests, as well as the results of lab work following miscarriages.

By law, medical records and documents containing personal identifying information must be disposed of in a way that protects privacy, and leaving them at a dump is probably illegal, privacy lawyers and hospital officials said. Violators face steep fines.

A Globe photographer discovered the records July 26 when he was dumping his trash at the Georgetown Transfer Station. When he got out of his car, he said, he saw a

RECORDS, Page A17

Many afflicted by potent poison ivy

By Patrick G. Lee
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

An unusually moist spring and a hot summer have conspired to produce a particularly abundant crop of poison ivy this year, leaving more Massachusetts residents than usual scratching their skin raw.

Scientists believe the plant might also be gaining in potency because, especially in cities, it is thriving on increasing carbon dioxide levels, partly the result of burning fossil fuels and cutting down forests.

Landscapers in the region have reported an increase in house calls about poison ivy, whose clear, liquid oil causes telltale streaks of red skin, rashes, and blisters.

"It's everywhere. It's out in force," said William Bartlett of Bethlehem, Conn., who has removed poison ivy for more than 30 years around Connecticut and Western Massachusetts. "I usually don't get busy until the beginning of June. I was busy since the 10th of April this year."

The exact number of poison ivy cases is hard to track, because many people use over-the-counter creams and sprays to quell the scratching without ever making a trip to the doctor. But sales of ointments commonly used to treat

Cambridge health group seeks buyer or partner

By Robert Weisman
GLOBE STAFF

Financially struggling Cambridge Health Alliance — which runs Cambridge Hospital, Somerville Hospital, and Whidden Memorial Hospital in Everett — is seeking a buyer or an affiliation with another Boston area health care provider.

Cambridge Health Alliance, whose "safety net" hospitals serve a large population of Medicaid patients and low-income immigrants, earlier this summer held preliminary talks with several teaching hospitals and physicians groups. In the past several weeks, its discussions have involved the state's two largest hospital groups: Partners HealthCare System Inc. and Caritas Christi

CAMBRIDGE HEALTH, Page A16

With layoffs, room for creativity

Firms find uses for vacant spaces

and days of bigger profits gone by, some companies are getting creative. They're putting up walls and subletting part of their space

together.

Local property management companies say they've had more requests for smaller offices and



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POISON IVY, Page A20

Poison ivy thrives in long, hot summer

► **POISON IVY**
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poison ivy exposure have increased significantly, according to spokesmen for their manufacturers.

In Greater Boston, purchases of Tecnu Extreme Medicated Poison Ivy Scrub, which is available in every major drugstore chain, are 24 percent higher this year compared with last, with most of the increase over the past few months.

Zanfel Poison Ivy Wash, another widely available option, has seen a 40 percent increase in its Northeast retail sales relative to last summer. Given that there is minimal advertising in the poison ivy product industry, the large changes can be attributed mostly to a greater need for the treatments, said Steve Sisler, vice president of sales at Zanfel Laboratories Inc.

Dr. Richard Zane, vice chairman of emergency medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital, said he has seen several patients with unusually severe allergic reactions to poison ivy over the past few months, and he expects more such cases will come to the emergency room well into the fall. In the worst cases, patients are treated with steroids to calm the reaction, and some need to be hospitalized.

Zane said one young man had worked an entire day in hot, humid weather, clearing brush from a side yard while wiping sweat from his neck, face, abdomen, and chest.

"It looked like a total upper body surface area burn with blistering, like a horrible drug reaction," Zane said. "He had not been exposed to this degree of poison ivy ever before in his life."

Brookline Village resident Paul Epstein suffered from a par-

ticularly nasty reaction to the plant last year and has since attempted to battle the recurring patch of poison ivy in his backyard, but only after donning head-to-toe protective gear.

Epstein, the associate director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School, studies the link between climate change and human ailments.

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of carbon dioxide — it's a perfect combination of things that create conditions" conducive to the growth of many allergenic plants, including poison ivy, he said.

Lewis Ziska, a plant specialist with the US Department of Agriculture, helped conduct a six-year study of the impact of carbon dioxide levels on poison ivy in a North Carolina forest.

The results, published in 2006, indicated that higher concentrations of carbon dioxide accelerate the growth of all plants, in particular opportunistic weeds like poison ivy. The gas also appears to make the plant's poison more powerful, the study found.

"Urban areas are already at the conditions we project for the rest of the world 30 to 40 years from now," Ziska said. "The temperature in an urban environment is already warmer than in a surrounding area, and carbon

dioxide is already higher."

That makes cities optimal places to host bigger and more poisonous infestations of the plant, Ziska said.

He has spotted poison ivy in Manhattan, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Boston. City dwellers who frequent parks or live by wooded areas should watch out for the plant's trademark trio of leaves, which are found on a shrub, vine, or ground cover.

Randy Prostak, a weeds scientist with the University of Massachusetts Extension in Amherst, said he advises people to be wary of the plant, given that it is often hard to spot and that its poisonous oil, if wiped on camping gear or the fur of a family pet, can be easily transferred to the skin and cause an allergic reaction. About 15 percent of the population is immune, although sensitivity to the plant's poison can change over time and usually increases with multiple exposures.

This year, the entire Northeast had about three extra weeks in early summer when the temperature and moisture levels were ideal for plant development, Prostak said. "We are dramatically ahead of . . . what we would normally see."

Dr. Jack Maypole's right hand fell victim to poison ivy last month. The director of pediatrics at the South End Community Health Center had a rash that lasted two weeks, during which he also dealt with a batch of poison ivy cases among his patients.

"I get it every year; I'm like a culture medium for the stuff," said Maypole, a Newton resident. "It grows in parks, in yards, along streets. It's sort of like trying to avoid air."

Patrick G. Lee can be reached at patrick.lee@globe.com.

The Boston Globe: A1

Watch out, it's everywhere

BY PATRICK G. LEE, Globe Correspondent

August 13, 2010

An unusually moist spring and a hot summer have conspired to produce a particularly abundant crop of poison ivy this year, leaving more Massachusetts residents than usual scratching their skin raw.

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The exact number of poison ivy cases is hard to track, because many people use over-the-counter creams and sprays to quell the scratching without ever making a trip to the doctor. But sales of ointments commonly used to treat poison ivy exposure have increased significantly, according to spokesmen for their manufacturers.

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