

Browntail Moth Caterpillar

Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

Paul R. LePage, Governor

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What are browntail moths and why should I worry?

The Maine Forest Service has seen a recent increase in browntail moths. The moth caterpillar has tiny poisonous hairs that can cause a skin rash similar to poison ivy and other more severe reactions in sensitive individuals. People within affected areas may be at risk.

What do the caterpillars look like?

They may reach 1.5 inches in length and are brown with a broken white stripe on each side and two red spots on the hind end.



What time of year am I at risk?

The caterpillars are active from April to late June though the hairs remain toxic throughout the summer.

Do I have to touch a caterpillar to get a rash?

No. The hairs break off from cast skins when the caterpillars molt. The hairs become airborne and are on surrounding plants and grass.

What symptoms can be caused by contact with the hairs?

Direct contact with airborne hairs can cause a localized skin rash that may last for a few hours up to several days. The rash may be red, bumpy and itchy. Certain people may experience a more severe form of the rash that may last for several weeks. In some cases, the poisonous hairs may be inhaled and can cause respiratory distress.

What are the possible treatments?

Treatment is based on eliminating exposure to the caterpillar hairs by removal of the hairs and treating the symptoms.

Start by taking a shower or cool bath and wash all clothing you were wearing outdoors. A mild rash may be treated with over-the-counter remedies. Consult your physician if you develop a severe reaction to the browntail moth hairs or have trouble breathing.

What can I do to prevent it?

- Avoid places heavily infested by caterpillars.
- Take a cool shower and change clothes after activities where you may come into contact with caterpillar hairs.
- Rake, mow, weed whack etc. when foliage is wet to prevent the hairs from becoming airborne. Also wear a respirator, goggles and coveralls.
- Dry laundry inside during June and July to avoid the hairs imbedding on clothing.

Where can I get more information?

If you are having symptoms related to brown-tail moths, contact the poison center at **1-800-222-1222**, [chat online](#) or **text POISON to 85511**.

For more information, contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the Maine.gov websites below:

Browntail moth Precautions -Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry:
http://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/forest_health/insects/browntail_moth_precautions.htm

Rash info - Department of Education:
<http://maine.gov/education/sh/environmental/browntail.pdf>

Browntail moth webpage - Maine Forest Service:
http://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/forest_health/invasive_threats/browntail_moth_info.htm