

# Health Risks from Browntail Moths

*The browntail moth is an invasive species active from April - July. The microscopic hairs found on browntail moth caterpillars, shed skins, and cocoons can cause skin reactions and breathing problems.*



## Symptoms:

Most individuals affected by the hairs develop a localized rash similar to poison ivy that will last for a few hours up to several days. In more sensitive individuals, the rash can be severe and last for weeks.

- Mild rashes can be treated at home with a cool bath with baking soda or oatmeal, hydrocortisone cream, such as Cortaid, Calamine or caladryl lotion.
- If home remedies are not working, see your healthcare provider.

Dislodged hairs can become airborne and cause trouble breathing, including respiratory distress.

- **If you are having trouble breathing or swallowing, or have swelling of your mouth, tongue, or throat, call 9-1-1.**
- You can take allergy medications for mild respiratory symptoms (e.g. runny nose, sneezing).
- If you have asthma, an inhaler may reduce symptoms.
- Call your healthcare provider if your symptoms continue.

## Ways to Reduce your Exposure:

- Avoid places heavily infested by caterpillars.
- Take cool showers and change clothes after any activity that may expose you to browntail moth hairs.
- Dry laundry inside during June and July to avoid having the hairs embedded in clothing.
- Wear a respirator, goggles, and coveralls tightly closed at the neck, wrists and ankles when performing activities that stir up caterpillar hairs such as mowing, raking, weed whacking, and removing pupal webbing from eaves and boats.
- Perform these tasks on damp days or spray down vegetation with a hose. The moisture helps keep the hairs from becoming airborne while working.

## For more information:

- Contact 211 Maine for answers to frequently asked questions on browntail moths.
- Maine CDC: [www.maine.gov/dhhs/browntailmoth](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/browntailmoth)
- Maine Forest Service: [www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/forest\\_health/invasive\\_threats/browntail\\_moth\\_info.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/forest_health/invasive_threats/browntail_moth_info.htm)