

Safety Alert



SUBJECT: PARSNIP PERIL (or WILD PARSNIP WARNING)

RECIPIENTS: All Council Services (including schools)

ISSUE DATE: October 2019

REF: HSA14

Highways England has issued an Environmental Warning relating to Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*), which can cause painful blistering on contact with skin.

Wild Parsnip can be identified by its small, yellow flowers, which form umbrella-shaped clusters 10 to 20 centimetres across, and its ridged, hairy and hollow stems which can grow up to 2m tall. Leaves are green with serrated edges, arranged in symmetrical sets of at least five on a single stem (please refer to photographs below). Wild parsnip grows on rough, dry, chalky grassland. This species is often noted in numbers near the safety barriers on the highways network, and is widespread in central and southern England.

Hazard

Wild Parsnip contains photo-sensitive chemicals that can make the skin hyper-sensitive to sunlight and cause a reaction known as phytophoto-dermatitis. This reaction can occur up to 48 hours after contact and is similar to a chemical burn where reddening, itching, blistering or burning can occur.

Action

DO NOT TOUCH this plant. If accidental contact is made with the plant's sap, please note the following:

- wash the area immediately
- cover the skin to prevent exposure to sunlight
- seek medical advice if blistering occurs.



Additional Information:

[G27.2 COSHH - Bacterial and Viral Infections from Soil, Water or Animals](#)

If you require further assistance or clarification on the subject please contact:
Corporate Health & Safety Advisers (see George section: Corporate > Information for Working > Risk Management > H&S Advisers)