**Why are they a problem?**

The browntail caterpillar has tiny (0.15 mm) hairs that on sensitive individuals cause a skin rash similar to poison ivy and/or trouble breathing.

The microscopic hairs break off the caterpillars and are everywhere in browntail infested areas; on trees, lawns, gardens, decks, picnic tables and in the air.

The hairs can remain toxic for up to THREE YEARS so although the problem is worst from May to July, they may cause a reaction at other times of year as well.

Wind or activities such as mowing, leaf-blowing, etc., can stir up the hairs, leading to a reaction.

The rash and trouble breathing can last anywhere from a few hours to several weeks. It is caused by both a chemical reaction to a toxin in the hairs and physical irritation from the barbed hairs. Contact your physician if a reaction is severe.

www.maine.gov/forestpests#btm
**Browntail Precautions**

- Avoid places heavily infested by caterpillars
- Take a **cool shower and change clothes** after activity that might involve contact with hairs
- **Dry laundry inside** during June and July to avoid hairs getting onto your clothing
- **Use caution** cleaning debris left by caterpillars because the toxin is extremely stable and remains a hazard for a number of years.
- In heavily infested areas, **wear respirator, goggles, and coveralls** (tightly sealed at neck, wrist, and ankles) when:
  - Mowing, raking, weed-whacking,
  - Removing webbing, or
  - Performing any activities that stir up browntail caterpillar hairs
- **Perform the above tasks on damp days or wet down material** with a hose as moisture helps minimize contact by keeping the hairs from becoming airborne.
- **Consult a physician** if you develop a severe reaction

**Browntail Control**

**Non-chemical:**
- Clip overwintering webs and destroy by soaking in soapy water or burning. (Wear gloves!)
- Clip webs in the winter and very early spring: October to mid-April.
- If caterpillars are on structures hose down with water and vacuum up with a HEPA filter vacuum.

**Chemical:**
- Look for a licensed arborist/pesticide applicator; licensing ensures they have specialized training and equipment to do the job properly.
- If making a DIY pesticide application on your own property, select a pesticide product carefully:
  - Ensure the intended site is listed on product label,
  - **Always FOLLOW LABEL INSTRUCTIONS,**
  - Preferably, choose a product that lists browntail moth on the label.
- Treat before the end of May to prevent development of the toxic hairs.
- Pesticide use within 250’ of marine waters is restricted.

**Identifying Winter Webs**

Browntail overwinters as colonies of caterpillars in white silk tightly woven around a leaf or leaves in trees or shrubs. These webs contain 25 to 400 caterpillars, are spun in the early fall, and remain firmly attached to the **tips** of small branches all winter. The webs are often confused with silken structures formed by other less serious species of moths.

**Browntail winter web description:**
- 2-5 inches (5-10 cm) long
- white silk **tightly** woven around a leaf or small number of leaves
- string of white silk tying leaf petiole to twig
- small brown hairy **caterpillars** inside dense silk web
- on branch **tips** of oak, apple, crabapple, cherry, shadbush and rugosa rose (occasionally other trees as well)

**Often mistaken for browntail webs: Old fall webworm** webs are formed by caterpillars in late summer, engulf the foliage and can become 2 to 3 feet (61-91 cm) long. By mid-fall the caterpillars have left the nests. The webs are often confused with silken structures formed by other less serious species of moths.

**Remnants of old tents of the eastern tent caterpillar** can also be mistaken for browntail winter webs. These webs are built in the **crotches** of branches on wild cherry and apple trees in late April and May and may be a foot or more long when fully formed. Eastern tent caterpillars are present in their webs from late April to June.