

# Safety Short

## Poison Ivy – Stop the Itch!!!

Each year, an estimated 25-40 million people in the United States will feel the infamous itch of poison ivy. There are other plants that people may be sensitive to; therefore, it is important to use caution when working outdoors whether at work or at home. Poison ivy, western poison oak, and poison sumac contain the poisonous oil, Urushiol. The oil is found not only in the leaves of these plants but in their roots, stems and fruit as well. The oil is released when the plant is bruised. It may be deposited on the skin by direct contact with the plant or by contact with contaminated objects such as the fur of pets, clothing, gloves, shoes, tools or other objects and then transferred to the skin. Severe cases have occurred from Urushiol-coated soot in the smoke of burning plants. Poison ivy is one of the most common causes of allergic contact dermatitis in the United States. 15% to 30% of people have no allergic response to Urushiol oil; however, the majority of people will become sensitized with repeated or more concentrated exposure to the oil. Reactions can progress from a rash to anaphylaxis - a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction.

## Poison Ivy Facts

Urushiol is extremely potent; ¼ ounce is enough to cause a rash in every person on earth.

Urushiol can stay active on any surface for up 5 years.

For most, this itchy rash will appear one or two days after they have been exposed to the plant, and the condition can last anywhere from 10 days to three weeks.

More than 50% of people are sensitive to the colorless, odorless resin, urushiol, found in the leaves of poison ivy.

The best method to prevent a poison ivy allergic reaction is to avoid exposure. Doing that, you avoid the need for poison ivy first aid.

**Know what Poison Ivy looks like** – Poison Ivy usually has three small leaves growing off of the same stem. The leaves are green in the summer months and turn red in the fall months. You can also identify them by the green or yellow flowers and white berries that also grow on the vines.

**Use Barrier Skin Creams** – Barrier skin creams, such as a lotion containing bentoquatam, may offer some protection before contact. Barrier creams should be washed off and reapplied twice a day.

**Wear Appropriate Clothing** – Wear long sleeved shirts, long pants, and gloves when working in areas that have poison ivy. You should also wear high boots and keep your pant legs tucked into them.

**Wash Clothing** – Remove and immediately wash any clothing that has come in contact with the poison ivy plant.



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**Wash Hands** – Wash your hands after touching any plants that could be poison ivy. Do not touch other parts of your body with dirty hands.

**Clean Tools** – After use, clean tools with rubbing alcohol (isopropanol or isopropyl alcohol) or soap and lots of water.

**Don't Burn Poison Ivy** – Do not burn plants that may be poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac. Inhaling smoke from burning plants can cause severe allergic respiratory problems.

## First Aid for Poison Ivy

If your skin is exposed to poison ivy, there are a few things you can do to relieve the pain.



1. Wash your skin as quickly as possible with soap and cold, running water. Do this within minutes of coming into contact with the plant to prevent the oil from absorbing into the skin.

Avoid vigorously scrubbing the area or using hot water since this may further open pores or cause more irritation to the skin.

2. Avoid rubbing or scratching the affected skin. It can cause the skin to break and spread the poison ivy to a larger area.

3. Cool off. People with poison ivy exposure tend to find relief from cool baths or cool compresses. You can use a towel with ice cubes wrapped in it on the area, or massage the affected area with an ice cube for relief. Allowing the area to air dry will reduce itching and oozing of blisters.

4. Use oral or topical antihistamines. Oral antihistamines such as Benadryl will help to reduce the itch of poison ivy. Use calamine lotion to reduce itching and redness.

5. Stop the rash from spreading to others. The fluid from the sores caused by poison ivy is not contagious. The rash caused by poison ivy will only spread to other areas of the body if the oil from the plant is spread. Once the oil has been removed from the skin, it is no longer possible to expose others.

6. Wash clothing and shoes. Be sure to wash the items you were wearing when you came into contact with the poison ivy. Use soap and hot water to remove any oil from the plant.

7. Give Fido a bath and wash tools. If a pet was exposed, the oils can spread via your pet's fur, or even on other items such as gardening tools. Thoroughly washing both pets and other items that may have come into contact with poison ivy to remove the oils.

8. If the reaction is severe, seek medical attention. Most cases of poison ivy can be handled at home, however poison ivy can be extremely serious or even fatal. In rare cases, poison ivy exposure can become severe in someone who's highly sensitized to the reaction, or if someone is exposed to a large amount of the oil, either by breathing in fumes when the plant is being burned or having the oils enter areas of broken skin.