



*SAFETY INCENTIVE PROGRAM*  
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## **SIP-TIP: POISON IVY IS LURKING**

The spring has passed, leaving an over abundant supply of poison ivy. This hardly poisonous plant is once again lurking, awaiting contact with those whose skin does not appreciate the effects of its sweet nectar (actually resin). Following is some information about poison ivy.



### **What is poison ivy?**

Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) has slightly glossy green leaves that grow in groups of three (3). Its flowers and berries, when present are greenish white. It's usually a vine although sometimes it is a shrub or ground cover. All parts of the plant contain a resin (an oily substance called urushiol) that can irritate the skin, causing blisters, and an itchy, red rash. There are related plants such as poison oak and poison sumac which can cause a similar red rash. Symptoms usually occur within 2-14 days after contact. The severity of the rash is based on the sensitivity of the individual's skin. (Some people do not get a rash after touching poison ivy.) Poison ivy can grow almost anywhere including grassy edge of the beach, the side of a road, back yards, and in wooded areas.



### **What should you do if you are exposed to poison ivy?**

Wash the resin off of your skin as soon as possible with a mild soap and water. Removing the resin from your skin within 10-15 minutes can reduce or prevent the rash by decreasing the amount of resin your skin will absorb. Be sure to scrub under your nails and keep them clipped. Resin that remains under your nails can be deposited on the skin by scratching. To clean your clothes wash them in hot water with non-chlorine bleach.

### **How is poison ivy spread?**

Poison ivy can be spread by contact with the resin, or you can be exposed to poison ivy without coming in direct contact. For instance your pets fur can carry the resin, firewood, gardening tools, sports equipment, even clothing can be contaminated. Droplets of this resin can be carried in the air by smoke from fires; this can irritate your lungs, nasal passage, mouth and skin. You cannot catch poison ivy by opening the blisters.

### **How do you treat poison ivy?**

If the rash appears, use a cool compress of Burow's Solution to soothe the skin, and help relieve the blistering. Plain calamine lotion will also be helpful, but be sure to wash your skin before each application to avoid infection. There is also a steroid cream that may reduce the irritation and swelling. The poison ivy rash usually disappears in 2-3 weeks. For severe cases contact your primary health care clinician.

**REMEMBER:** Learn to recognize the poison ivy plant and teach employees to avoid it. Wear long pants and a long sleeved shirt when working in areas where poison ivy is known to grow.