



Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance professionals at Sullivan Benefits

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, the oil, or sap, from poison ivy, oak and sumac produces rash in up to 85 percent of people whose skin absorbs it.

POISON IVY, OAK AND SUMAC

Poison ivy, oak and sumac are the most common causes of contact dermatitis, or skin rash, in the United States. These plants—most often found in areas such as woods, beaches and rivers—do not only cause some fairly itchy discomfort, but can also cause severe allergic reactions.

Causes

You can be exposed to poison ivy, oak or sumac when you come into contact with the plant or its sap by:

- Directly touching or handling the plant
- Handling items with sap on them, such as clothing, shoes or pets
- Inhaling the smoke of these plants when burned

Signs and Symptoms

A skin rash usually appears a day or two after contact and can range from mild to severe. The following are possible signs of contact with poison ivy, oak or sumac:

- Is your skin a very bright red color?
- Do you have severe itching, swelling or blisters?
- Do you have a rash on large areas of your body or face?
- Do you have a rash that is spreading to the mouth, eyes or genitals?
- Does your rash contain pus?

Prevention & Self-Care

To help prevent a rash:

- Know what these plants look like and avoid them. Poison ivy and poison oak both have three leaflets per stem. Poison sumac has seven to 11 leaflets.

- Use an over-the-counter (OTC) lotion which blocks skin contact with the sap. Use as directed.
- Keep your hands away from eyes, nose and face.
- Don't scratch! Bacteria found under fingernails can lead to infection if a rash develops.

To help prevent an allergic reaction:

- Remove all clothes and shoes that have touched the plant. Wash with hot water and strong soap or detergent.
- Rinse affected areas of skin with soap and water.
- Apply rubbing alcohol or alcohol wipes to areas where skin is affected.
- Use an OTC product that removes poison ivy sap.

Make sure to take these precautions as quickly as possible after exposure or contact with these plants (preferably within 30 minutes, up to within six hours.)

Other Helpful Hints

- Keep the rash cool by showering, rinsing or soaking in cold water.
- Take lukewarm baths and add an OTC colloidal oatmeal product.
- Apply calamine lotion, topical steroid cream or a paste mixture—3 teaspoons of baking soda and 1 teaspoon water—to affected areas. Use this mixture to saturate gauze bandages, then cover blisters for 10 minutes, four times a day.
- Take an OTC antihistamine to relieve itching.
- Bathe pets that have come in contact with the plant; sap can remain on fur for days.
- Wear rubber gloves when cleaning items used to wash clothing and pets.

