

## **LATEX ALLERGY: *The Hidden Danger***

### **LATEX**

Natural rubber latex comes from a liquid in rubber trees. This liquid is processed to make many rubber products used at home and work.

### **LATEX ALLERGY**

The protein in rubber can cause an allergic reaction in some people. This allergic reaction is more acute with thin, stretchy rubber, the kind found in gloves, condoms and balloons than with hard rubber found in tires.

Some familiar household products containing latex are: Balloons, chewing gum, rubber toys, pacifiers and baby-bottle nipples, rubber bands, adhesive tape and bandages, diapers and sanitary pads, condoms and elastic in underwear.

In addition, many medical and dental supplies contain latex: gloves, urinary catheters, dental dams and material used to fill root canals, tourniquets and resuscitation equipment.

All of these items comprise only a *partial* list of latex-containing items – be sure to do your own research in your home and work environment to see where latex is found.

Non-latex substitutes can be found for all of these latex-containing items.

Many rubber gloves are coated with cornstarch to make them easier to put on and off. Rubber protein particles stick to this powder and fly into the air when the gloves are removed. In places such as hospitals or doctors and dentists offices where latex gloves are removed frequently, the air may contain many latex particles.

***INFANTS AND CHILDREN, WHO HAVE MULTIPLE SURGERIES OR MEDICAL PROCEDURES, AND HEALTH CARE WORKERS, ARE PARTICULARLY AT RISK FOR LATEX ALLERGY.***

## **SYMPTOMS OF LATEX ALLERGY**

The most common and mild symptoms of latex allergy are a hive-like rash, swollen or watery eyes, sneezing or running nose and coughing.

Severe symptoms are chest tightness, shortness of breath, shock and even death.

***A LATEX SENSITIVE PERSON CAN HAVE A LIFE-THREATENING ALLERGIC REACTION WITHOUT ANY PREVIOUS WARNING OR SYMPTOMS.***

Some people who wear latex gloves at work may develop bumps, sores, cracks or red, raised areas on their hands that lasts for days or weeks. These reactions may be the result of frequent hand washing, antiseptics, constantly covered hands or chemicals in the gloves. Using glove liners, changing to non-latex gloves and giving more attention to hand care can help.

***PEOPLE WITH SPINA BIFIDA AND UROLOGIC ABNORMALITIES ARE AT INCREASED RISK FOR LATEX ALLERGY.***

## **PREVENTING LATEX ALLERGY**

The more frequently one is exposed to latex, the more severe the sensitization and reaction. Therefore, it is very important that infants who, from birth on, will need many

operations are *not* exposed to latex at all! The best course of action is prevention to exposure and subsequent sensitization to the latex.

## **LATEX ALLERGY AND FOOD**

Some food proteins and some proteins in rubber are similar. Therefore certain foods can evoke a reaction in people with latex allergy. It is recommended that only foods that have already caused an allergic reaction be avoided so that proper nutrition is maintained.

***COMMON FOODS TO AVOID ARE: BANANAS, AVOCADOS, CHESTNUTS, KIWI FRUIT AND TOMATOES. DIET SODAS SHOULD ALSO BE AVOIDED***

## TESTING FOR LATEX ALLERGY

Providing a doctor with a detailed history and having a blood test taken can confirm whether or not one has a latex allergy. Skin testing can also be done, but only at specialized centers since it can cause a severe reaction. Such tests should only be administered by specially trained professionals.

## WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE HAS A LATEX ALLERGY

***ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO CURE FOR LATEX ALLERGY, RISK OF REACTION CAN BE REDUCED BY AVOIDING DIRECT CONTACT WITH LATEX***

It is imperative that a person with a latex allergy learn which products in the environment contain latex and learn how to substitute non-latex products.

It is important to avoid breathing in latex particles from powdered gloves.

***•HEALTHCARE WORKERS SHOULD MAKE SURE THAT EVERYONE IN THEIR SHARED ENVIRONMENT WEARS POWDER FREE LATEX OR NON-LATEX GLOVES.***

***•OLDER PATIENTS, WHEN THEY CAN, SHOULD MAKE SURE THAT THEIR CAREGIVERS ARE WEARING NON-LATEX GLOVES.***

***•PARENTS SHOULD ENSURE THAT THEIR INFANTS AND CHILDREN ARE ALWAYS HANDLED BY CAREGIVERS WEARING NON-LATEX GLOVES.***

Wear a Medic-Alert bracelet or necklace. Talk to the doctor about a prescription for an epinephrine self-injection pen to use in case of serious reaction. Consider

carrying non-latex gloves at all times to be used in case of emergency. Carry oral benadryl (diphenhydramine) wherever you go.

People allergic to latex and exposed to it on the job need to make sure employers and co-workers know about latex allergy. If latex gloves *are* used by co-workers then powder-free gloves should be used. This will prevent others from becoming allergic.

### **LEARN MORE ABOUT LATEX ALLERGY**

Learn more by joining these resource network and support groups. Work to support workplace and industry practices and government legislation that supports the safe use of latex and non-latex alternatives.

*Latex Allergy News*, the information vehicle of ELASTIC (Education for Latex Allergy Support Team and Information Coalition). Telephone: 860 482-6869

Delaware Valley Latex Allergy Support Network  
Telephone: 800-Latex-NO (800 528-3966)  
[www.latex-allergy.org](http://www.latex-allergy.org)

Spina Bifida Association of America can supply an updated list of latex products and substitutes. Telephone: 800 621-3141. [www.sbba.org](http://www.sbba.org)

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