



WHAT IS LATEX?

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

- Balloons
- Rubber toys
- Pacifiers and baby-bottle nipples
- Rubber bands
- Adhesive tape and bandages
- Diapers and sanitary pads
- Condoms

In addition, many medical and dental supplies contain latex, including gloves, urinary catheters, dental dams and material used to fill root canals, as well as tourniquets and equipment for resuscitation. Non-latex substitutes can be found for all of these latex-containing items.

WHAT IS LATEX ALLERGY?

The protein in rubber can cause an allergic reaction in some people. The thin, stretchy latex rubber in gloves, condoms, and balloons is high in this protein. It causes more allergic reactions than products made of hard rubber (like tires). Also, because some latex gloves are coated with cornstarch powder, the latex protein particles stick to the cornstarch and fly into the air when the gloves are taken off. In places where gloves are being put on and removed frequently, the air may contain many latex particles.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LATEX ALLERGY?

Latex allergy can be mild or severe, with symptoms such as:

- Itchy, red, watery eyes
- Sneezing or runny nose
- Coughing
- Rash or hives
- Chest tightness and shortness of breath
- Shock

Some people who wear latex gloves get bumps, sores, cracks or red, raised areas on their hands. These symptoms usually appear 12 to 36 hours after contact with latex. Changing to non-latex gloves, using glove liners, and paying more attention to hand care can help relieve these symptoms

A latex-sensitive person can also have a life-threatening allergic reaction with no previous warning or symptoms.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR LATEX ALLERGY?

Health care workers and rubber industry workers seem to have the highest risk for latex allergy. Health care workers with hay fever have an especially high chance of developing a latex allergy, as 25 percent of all health care workers with hay fever show signs of being latex sensitized. People also at risk are those who have had many operations in childhood, and people with spina bifida and urologic abnormalities.

Latex products are everywhere. Anyone can become allergic to latex.



IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN LATEX ALLERGY & FOODS?

Because some proteins in rubber are similar to food proteins, some foods may cause an allergic reaction in people who are allergic to latex. The most common of these foods are banana, avocado, chestnut, kiwi fruit and tomato. Although many other foods can cause an allergic reaction, avoiding all of them might cause nutrition problems. Therefore, it's recommended that you avoid only the foods that have already given you an allergic reaction.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A LATEX ALLERGY?

See a doctor, preferably one with experience in treating latex allergy. Your doctor will take a detailed history and may confirm the diagnosis with a blood test. Skin testing is usually not used to test for latex allergy, except in some specialized centers. It can cause severe reactions if it isn't done by an experienced person.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I FIND OUT I HAVE A LATEX ALLERGY?

Although there is no treatment for latex allergy, you can reduce your risk of reaction by avoiding direct contact with latex. Take steps to find out which products in your environment contain latex. Then, find substitutes you can use for those products. It's also important to avoid breathing in latex particles from powdered gloves.

If you are a health care worker or a patient, everyone around you should wear powder-free latex gloves or non-latex gloves. If you are a health care worker, compare different kinds of non-latex gloves to find the ones that are best for you.

Always wear or carry a medical alert bracelet, necklace or keychain that warns emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and doctors that you are allergic to latex. Talk to your doctor about getting a prescription for an epinephrine self-injection pen, to use in case of a serious reaction. You may wish to carry non-latex gloves with you all the time for use by emergency personnel if you need medical attention.

If you are exposed to latex at your job, tell your employer and co-workers about your latex allergy. Avoid latex gloves completely if you're not at risk for blood and body fluid contamination. Use powder-free gloves if latex gloves are preferable. These measures will help keep others from becoming allergic to latex.

HOW CAN I LEARN ABOUT LATEX ALLERGY?

Take steps to educate yourself and others. Work to support workplace policies, industry practices and government legislation that will support the safe use of latex and non-latex alternatives.