

Latex Allergy:

Allergic reactions to latex may be serious and can very rarely be fatal. If you have latex allergy you should limit or avoid future exposure to latex products.

People who are at higher risk for developing latex allergy include:

- Health care workers and others who frequently wear latex gloves
- People who have had multiple surgeries (for example, 10 or more), such as children with spina bifida
- People who are often exposed to natural rubber latex, including rubber industry workers
- People with other allergies, such as hay fever (allergic rhinitis) or allergy to certain foods

What Is Natural Rubber Latex?

Natural rubber latex comes from the sap of the rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*, found in Africa and Southeast Asia. Allergic reactions to products made with latex develop in persons who become allergic (or sensitized) to proteins contained in natural rubber latex. Natural rubber latex should not be confused with synthetic rubber made from chemicals. Synthetic rubber products, including “latex” house paints, are not made with natural latex and do not trigger allergic reactions in people who are allergic to products made with natural rubber latex.

What products contain natural rubber latex?

Latex is a common component of many medical and dental supplies. These include disposable gloves, dental dams, airway and intravenous tubing, syringes, stethoscopes, catheters, dressings and bandages. Latex also is found in many consumer products. These include condoms, handbags, balloons, athletic shoes, tires, tools, underwear leg and waistbands, rubber toys, baby bottles, nipples and pacifiers.

Triggers and Symptoms:

What triggers the allergic reaction to latex?

When people with latex allergy come into direct contact with latex, an allergic reaction may follow. Common examples include:

- A medical or dental procedure conducted by health care workers wearing natural rubber latex gloves
- Blowing up a rubber balloon

What are latex allergy symptoms?

In most cases, latex allergy develops after many previous exposures to latex. Latex allergy symptoms may include hives, itching, stuffy or runny nose. It can cause asthma symptoms of wheezing, chest tightness and difficulty breathing. Symptoms begin within minutes after exposure to latex containing products. The most severe latex allergy can result in anaphylaxis, a serious allergic reaction involving severe breathing difficulty and/or fall in blood pressure (shock).

Allergic skin problems can occur following direct contact with allergic latex proteins in latex glove products. Symptoms may include immediate itching, redness and swelling of skin that touched the item containing latex. These and other latex allergic reactions are less common now. Many hospitals or doctors' offices have switched to non-latex gloves or low protein latex gloves.

A second type of skin allergy called "allergic contact dermatitis" may be caused by chemicals used to manufacture rubber gloves. This dermatitis is recognized by the eczema and blisters on the back of the hands. It resembles a poison ivy rash, and begins 1 to 3 days after wearing rubber gloves.

Direct physical contact with latex products is not needed to trigger an allergic reaction. Anaphylaxis and severe asthmatic reactions have been caused by inhaling latex proteins in the air resulting from the powder in the latex glove.

What foods are potential problems for people with latex allergy?

If you have latex allergy you also can have food allergies. The foods most likely to cause this problem include: apple, avocado, banana, carrot, celery, chestnut, kiwi, melons, papaya, raw potato and tomato.

Management and Treatment

How is latex allergy diagnosed?

Latex allergy is diagnosed by an allergy blood test.

How is latex allergy treated?

The best treatment for latex allergy is avoidance. If you have severe latex allergy reaction you should:

- Wear medical alert identification
- Carry an epinephrine (adrenaline) auto-injector for emergency treatment
- Health care workers with a history of latex sensitivity who must wear gloves should stop wearing latex gloves. Their co-workers should also not use latex gloves, but rather switch to synthetic gloves.

Patients with latex allergy are at risk of asthma on exposure to latex-containing aerosols. They should try to avoid areas where powdered latex gloves or other latex products are used.