

Patient Education Latex Allergy

What is latex allergy?

The protein in rubber can cause an allergic reaction in some people. The thin, stretchy 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 rubber gloves are coated with cornstarch powder, the rubber 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.

Mild Symptoms

- ★ itchy, red, watery eyes
- ★ sneezing or runny nose
- ★ coughing
- ★ rash or hives

Severe Symptoms

- ★ chest tightness
- ★ shortness of breath
- ★ shock
- ★ may even cause death

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

Many household products contain latex, including the following items:

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

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

Who is at risk for latex allergy?

Latex products are everywhere. Anyone can become allergic to latex. People with the highest risk are those who have had many operations, especially in childhood. People with spina bifida and urologic abnormalities are also at risk.

Is there a connection between latex allergy and foods?

Because some proteins in rubber are similar to some 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
- ★ tomato

What should I do at home if 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 and the substitutes you can use for those products. It's also important to avoid breathing in latex particles from powdered gloves.

The most important thing you can do is to make sure your healthcare provider is aware of your latex allergy!

Always wear a Medic-Alert bracelet or necklace. 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.