PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION / *LATEX ALLERGY*

**What is latex allergy?**

Many people, including children, have an allergy to a rubber material called latex. Latex is made from the sap of the rubber tree and is found in many common items such as toys, gloves, clothing and many medical products. Reactions can be seen when products made from latex come in contact with a person’s skin, mucous membranes in the mouth, genital area, bladder, rectum or the blood stream.

**What kind of symptoms do latex-allergic patients get?**

Persons who are allergic to latex (or rubber products) may develop any or all of the following symptoms within minutes to hours after contact with latex: itching, skin rash, hives, swelling, watery eyes, stuffy nose and difficulty breathing. In severe instances, unconsciousness and death may result.

**What kind of exposure can result in allergic reactions?**

Skin contact with latex gloves, latex condoms or blowing up a balloon may cause an allergic reaction in people who have a latex allergy. Latex coming in contact with mucous membranes (use of a bladder catheter or latex barium enema) can also cause an allergic reaction. Injected latex through a latex intravenous port or inhaling small latex particles in a setting such as an operating room or clinic where latex products are commonly used can cause an allergic reaction. Some people may be more likely to become allergic to latex than others. This may include people who have:

- Increased contact with latex
- Multiple operations since birth
- Spina Bifida
- Congenital defects of the urinary system
- Food allergies, especially to bananas, kiwis, tomatoes, peaches, avocados, and papaya

If you have any of these risk factors, then products with rubber should be avoided, even if you have never had any of the signs listed above.

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What latex products are associated with allergic reactions?

There are many products that contain latex. The following are some of the products that have been associated with allergic reactions:

- Rubber gloves
- Balloons
- Condoms
- Dental dams or prophylaxis cups
- Barium enema catheters
- Rubber toys
- Bladder catheters
- Sports equipment (e.g. scuba masks)

How does one prevent allergic reactions to latex?

Avoidance of exposure to latex products is the only known method to prevent allergic reactions to persons. It is necessary for latex-allergic patients to follow these guidelines:

1. Avoid exposure to latex or rubber products.
2. Carry a supply of non-latex gloves in the event that these products are not available.
3. Discuss with your physician the use of injectable epinephrine in the event of an emergency and have it available in all situations.
4. Wear a medi-alert bracelet labeled “ALLERGIC TO LATEX”.
5. Make sure that hospital charts and medical records are clearly labeled for the presence of latex allergy.
6. Remind your doctor or dentist about your latex allergy before each visit.

Allergy Tests

Testing is available. Speak with your health care provider if you would like to be tested.

Resources

For more information contact:

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
611 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202
Phone: (800) 822-2762
www.aaaai.org

American Latex Allergy Association
PO Box 13930
Milwaukee, WI 53213
Phone: (888) 97-ALERT
www.latexallergyresources.org