Latex Allergy

Latex comes from the sap of rubber trees. A latex allergy is an immune system response to certain proteins found in natural rubber latex. This response to latex (rubber) products may include the symptoms listed below.

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Itchy throat
- Wheezing
- Hives
- Rash
- Swelling

These responses can occur when items that contain latex touch the skin, mucous membranes (mouth, genitals, bladder, or rectum), open areas on the skin, or the bloodstream (during surgery). For some people, breathing the powder that is inside latex gloves or balloons can cause a response.

Symptoms often result immediately after contact. Reactions to latex can range from mild to severe. With severe reactions, symptoms occur within minutes and involve multiple body systems. This life threatening condition is called anaphylaxis.

Latex is found in many products used in the hospital, the community, and the home. Possible sources of latex include:

**Hospital and Clinic**
- IV tubing
- Surgical and exam gloves
- Catheters
- Tourniquets
- Adhesive tapes
- Elastic bandages

**Home and Community**
- Baby bottle nipples
- Elastic on diapers, clothes
- Pacifiers
- Balloons
- Toys
- Erasers
- Art Supplies
- Dental Dams
- Condoms

There are non-latex products for all of these items. They are often made of plastic, vinyl, or silicone.
People at Risk

Anyone can acquire a latex allergy. Most often, it occurs after frequent exposure to latex. With each exposure, this reaction can become more severe. Certain groups of people are at greater risk. They are often people who have frequent exposure to latex. Health care professionals and those who work in the latex industry are at higher risk. Others at higher risk are those who have:

- Spina bifida
- Multiple surgeries
- History of allergic reaction to multiple intravenous medicines
- Certain food allergies (bananas, avocados, chestnuts, kiwi and tomato)

Avoiding Latex

There are medicines to help treat the symptoms of latex allergy. The best treatment is to avoid contact with latex.

- Alert your health care team if you have had a reaction to latex or unexplained allergic reaction during surgery.
- Avoid all latex products. Use other kinds of gloves, tape, pacifiers, etc. Substitutes for latex gloves: nitrile or vinyl gloves
- Ask your doctors about pre-medication before surgery.
- For serious reactions, talk to your doctor about getting an epinephrine device.
- Wear a Medic Alert bracelet or necklace, if desired.

People with spina bifida or urologic malformations should be on latex alert. They should avoid latex products to lessen the chance of this allergy in the future.

Children with a Latex Allergy

Communication is the key. You will need to alert anyone involved in your child’s care.

- All health care providers
- Schools
- Day care workers
- Baby sitters

Teach your child to recognize and avoid latex products. Be sure that your child’s medical, dental, and school records have a latex allergy alert.

Resources

UWHC Pediatric Allergy Clinic
(608) 263-6180

UWHC Adult Allergy Clinic
(608) 263-6180

UWHC Spina Bifida Clinic
(608) 263-6420

Spina Bifida Association of America
4590 MacArthur Boulevard NW, Suite 250
Washington, DC 2007-4226
1-800-621-3141

The above information was adapted with permission from the Spina Bifida Association of America.
Reference

American Latex Allergy Association: http://www.latexallergyresources.org/
Latex Allergy Links: http://latexallergylinks.tripod.com/
AAAAI-American Academy of Asthma and Immunology: http://www.aaal.org

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 12/2016 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#4648.