

Latex Reactions and Allergy

What is latex?

Latex is a milky sap found in certain trees in Asia and Brazil. It is processed into rubber products.

There are 3 types of latex reactions:

1. Some people develop allergy to the proteins in latex. This may cause hives, swelling, shortness of breath, runny nose and, severe allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis. Sometimes these symptoms are very serious.
2. Some people develop a skin rash called contact dermatitis. This is a reaction to the chemicals added to the natural latex in the manufacturing process and not to the latex proteins themselves. The rash can last weeks, but there is no risk of anaphylaxis.
3. Some people do not develop allergy but can develop skin irritation from latex products. This is not serious, but can be very bothersome.

What contains latex?

Latex is found in many medical and non-medical products, in health care facilities, at home, and in the community.

Learn to read labels. Here is a partial list of things that may contain latex:

Medical	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anaesthesia products such as intubation tubes, face masks etc. • Catheters – urinary, rectal etc. • Blood pressure cuffs • Dental dams • Rubber gloves • Surgical gloves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balloons • Rubber gloves • Condoms and diaphragms • Elastic bands • Elastic threads • Erasers • Foam rubber • Grips on sports rackets • Some baby pacifiers (soothers) and nipples • Some toys, rubber balls

Check with your pharmacist to see if a product you want to buy in the drug store has latex in it.

'Latex' paint and caulking material do not contain latex.

Who is at risk of having a latex allergy or reaction?

People who work with rubber, wear latex gloves regularly, or are often exposed to products made of latex are at risk. This could be at home, on the job, at a health care facility or dental office. Health care workers, dental workers, rubber workers and people who work in non-latex free glove factories have a higher risk of getting a latex allergy. People with hay fever, asthma, contact dermatitis or eczema may be more susceptible as well.

People with certain medical problems such as spina bifida, urogenital problems, or who have multiple surgical procedures are at risk.

Allergies to certain foods such as banana, avocado, kiwi, papaya, and water chestnuts can be associated with latex allergy. This happens in about 10% of people with latex allergy.

How would I know if I have latex allergy?

Latex allergy can start with a rash, hives or swelling of the skin. This could affect your hands if you are wearing latex gloves or cause swelling of your lips if you are blowing up a balloon. You may have hay fever type symptoms such as itchy swollen eyes, runny nose and sneezing when exposed to latex.

More severe reactions would be breathing problems such as coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath or a tight feeling in your chest when exposed to latex. If you have any of these symptoms, go to an Emergency Department right away. It is hard to tell how severe a reaction will be after contact with latex. A severe reaction may occur even when you have had only a mild reaction in the past.

Allergic reactions to latex can result from exposures such as:

- a dental worker puts a gloved hand in your mouth
- a catheter is put into your body for an x-ray or procedure
- a catheter is put into your bladder for drainage
- health care workers wearing latex gloves or using equipment made with latex during surgery
- being in a room where many latex products such as gloves are being used

What do I do if I think I may have a latex allergy?

If you think you may have a reaction to latex, talk to your health care provider. Your health care provider will arrange to have you assessed by an allergist. You will be asked questions about the types of products that affect you and how they affect you.

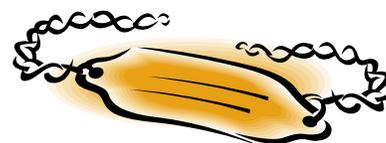
You will then have a skin test done by an allergist to know if you are allergic to latex. The allergist will provide you with more information depending on the results.

Can a latex allergy get worse?

Yes, it can get worse if you continue to be exposed to latex.

Medical Alert Identification

- You need to wear medical alert Identification.



Is there any cure or treatment for latex allergy?

There is no cure for latex allergy. The only treatment is to avoid latex. If you develop symptoms after you are accidentally exposed to latex, you may need medication to reduce allergic symptoms. Speak to your health care provider.

What do I need to do?

This takes some planning on your part. Here are some ideas:

- Carry latex-free gloves with you in case of emergency.
- Tell all health care providers that you are allergic to latex. Non-latex products such as gloves, catheters, dental dams, face masks, intubation tubes and intravenous tubes without latex injection ports need to be used.
- If you are scheduled for surgery, careful planning must be done to avoid latex exposure. For example, it is best if you are booked for the first operation of the day. Everyone in the room must use latex free gloves to avoid latex powder in the air.
- You need to avoid all of the products listed on page one, read labels carefully and ask for help when in doubt.

