



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Latex allergy involves reactions of the body to natural rubber latex. Latex is a milky fluid produced by rubber trees and is used in thousands of products. Rubber gloves are the main source of allergic reactions. There are three types of reactions: irritant dermatitis, allergic contact dermatitis, and immediate-type latex allergy.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Irritant contact dermatitis:

- Dry, crusty, itchy, sore areas on the skin.
- Usually affects the hands.

Allergic contact dermatitis (chemical sensitive):

- Rash that starts 6 to 48 hours after exposure.
- Skin is dry and crusty. Blisters and sores occur.
- Usually affects the hands, but may spread.

Immediate type latex allergy:

- Normally occurs right away, but could take hours.
- Skin is red and itchy; may have hives.
- Eyes are red and watery.
- Runny nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Chest feels tight; may be short of breath.
- Shock or a life-threatening reaction (rare).

CAUSES

- Irritant dermatitis is due to the skin being irritated.
- Allergic contact dermatitis is due to a chemical in the product, not latex. (This is like a poison ivy reaction.)
- In immediate-type latex allergy, the body's immune system reacts to repeated exposure to latex products.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Health care workers or others who use latex gloves often, or are exposed to them.
- Having had many operations (where you were exposed to latex gloves).
- Other allergies, such as hay fever, asthma, and eczema.
- Food allergies, including avocado and banana.
- Rubber industry and latex manufacturing workers.
- Certain disorders present at birth, such as spina bifida.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

For those diagnosed with the allergy, avoid latex.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

There is no cure for latex allergy. Repeated exposure to latex can worsen the immune system response. Avoiding latex is the best action. Many products are made from latex, so this is not always easy to do.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Some people may need to change jobs due to latex exposure in their workplace.
- Rarely, anaphylaxis, a severe, life-threatening reaction occurs. Seek emergency help if this happens.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and may confirm the diagnosis with a blood test. Skin testing is rarely done, as it may result in a severe reaction.
- There is no treatment, except to avoid latex products.
- Find out which products in your home and work contain latex. Find substitutes you can use for those products. Read labels, or ask, before buying a product.
- Health care workers and others should wear powder-free latex gloves or non-latex gloves. Powder can get in the air, and if breathed in can cause a reaction.
- Most male condoms, as well as diaphragms and cervical caps, are latex. If you use them, ask your health care provider about options for birth control and safe sex.
- Wear a medical alert type tag or ID that lets others know you have this allergy.
- Advise any health care provider you consult that you have a latex allergy.
- Discuss your latex allergy with your employer to find ways to avoid latex exposure in your workplace.
- If your allergy is severe, carry a kit with a self-injecting device that contains the drug epinephrine. Know how to use the device. Instruct your family or others as to how to give the injection if you are unable to.
- To learn more: Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, 1125 15th Street, NW, Suite 502, Washington, DC 20005; (800) 7-ASTHMA; website: www.aafa.org or Latex Allergy Links website: www.latexallergylinks.org.

MEDICATIONS

Drugs may be prescribed for allergy symptoms.

ACTIVITY

No limits.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member has latex allergy symptoms.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page