

# latex allergy

## *What is natural rubber latex?*

NATURAL RUBBER IS A HIGHLY PROCESSED PLANT PRODUCT FROM THE LATEX OF THE COMMERCIAL RUBBER TREE. ABOUT 90% IS PROCESSED FOR MANUFACTURE OF EXTRUDED RUBBER PRODUCTS, MOULDED GOODS OR PNEUMATIC TYRES.

The remaining 10% is used for the manufacture of rubber gloves and other *dipped* products, such as condoms, swimming caps and balloons. Although there are traces of latex allergen in tyre dust, dipped rubber products are responsible for most allergic reactions.

### *What is a latex allergy?*

A latex allergy is an allergy to products made from natural rubber latex. The allergy-causing particles become attached to the cornstarch powder in gloves, swimming caps and balloons. Moisture from the skin can enhance this process. The particles can become airborne and inhaled when products are used. Sensitized individuals react to these particles. Milk protein is sometimes mixed in with latex in surgical and household gloves and this can be the cause of reactions in milk allergic individuals.

### *Who is at risk of a latex allergy?*

Adults and children most at risk are those with other allergies such as eczema, asthma and hayfever. Those who have regular contact with natural rubber latex such as powdered gloves or catheters are the most likely to become sensitized.

### *What are the symptoms of a latex allergy?*

The reactions can be mild and cause rashes on the hands, itchy swollen eyes, runny nose and sneezing. An asthma attack can occur.





It is also possible to have a severe life threatening allergic reaction (*anaphylactic shock*). This occurs when the latex particles come in contact with mucous membranes.

Not all skin reactions are due to latex allergy. It is also possible to have a contact dermatitis reaction from chemicals used in rubber products. These don't appear immediately but 1 or 2 days after contact with the offending product.

### How are latex and rubber allergies identified?

Those who suspect that they have a latex allergy should have skin prick test by an allergy specialist. Other skin tests can determine whether the allergy is due to natural rubber latex or the added chemicals.

### Can a latex allergy get worse?

Yes.

### Are there other special allergies in those with latex allergies?

Yes. Foods such as banana, avocado, kiwi fruit, tomato and pineapple can cause tingling, itching or discomfort in the mouth and throat. If there is a reaction avoidance is recommended. This tends to be the case as the reaction is unpleasant. Occasionally severe reactions requiring treatment with adrenaline can occur to these foods.

### When can life-threatening reactions occur?

Latex allergic individuals can experience a potentially life-threatening reaction in a variety of situations. including:

- CATHETERS BEING INSERTED FOR MEDICAL PROCEDURES
- CONTACT WITH CONDOMS
- ABDOMINAL SURGERY
- DENTAL SURGERY
- CHILDBIRTH
- MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS WHERE GLOVES ARE WORN
- BLOWING UP TOY BALLOONS
- CONTACT WITH LATEX SWIMMING CAPS OR THEIR POWDER
- CONTACT WITH RUBBER HANDLES ON RACQUETS

Anaphylactic shock occurs within minutes of exposure to direct tissue contact or inhalation of powder. The reaction may be fatal and must be promptly treated with adrenaline.

A life-threatening allergic reactions may be the first sign of a latex allergy especially in children.

LATEX ALLERGY

# precautions

**CONTACT WITH ALL LATEX PRODUCTS SHOULD BE AVOIDED.**

The biggest risk comes from powdered rubber gloves in the medical, dental and household setting. Many adhesives and condoms can cause a severe reaction.

**INFORM YOUR DOCTOR AND DENTIST** about your latex allergy.

Remember to also inform anyone else like your hairdresser who may use powdered gloves.

**WEAR A MEDICAL ALERT BRACELET.**

**CARRY ADRENALINE** for first-aid treatment.

Keep a check on th expiry date.

**CARRY YOUR OWN SUPPLY OF LATEX-FREE GLOVES.** Note that there are no latex-free condoms available in Australia as yet.

Diaphragms for contraceptive purposes are also made from latex

**SURGICAL PROCEDURES** need to be carefully planned so the operating theatre can be prepared.

**IF YOU ARE A HEALTH CARE WORKER** your special requirements will need to be discussed as all the staff in the area will need to wear non-powdered gloves.

**INFORM PARTY ORGANIZERS** and school functions to avoid balloon displays.

**INFORM SPORTS TEACHERS AND INSTRUCTORS** as school swimming carnivals and swimming lessons in groups may present a risk if there are a lot of new powdered latex caps.

**AVOID USING RUBBER BATH MATS.**

**AVOID USING LATEX MASKS** on spacers for asthma treatment.



*Sources of natural rubber latex*

- Rubber gloves
- Surgical gloves
- Catheters
- Face masks
- Teats & dummies
- Condoms and diaphragms
- Rubber tubing
- Bicycle tyres
- Elastic bands
- Swimming caps
- Balloons
- Elastic in garments
- Natural rubber latex pillows & mattresses
- Rubber Bathmats