

DC 37 SAFETY AND HEALTH FACTSHEET

LATEX ALLERGIES

FACTS AT-A-GLANCE

- Latex allergies are very common. Over 3 million people in the US are affected each year.
 - Treatment can help, but there is no cure for latex allergies.
 - Your doctor can determine if you have a latex allergy or if you're at risk of developing a latex allergy.
 - Examination gloves, condoms, rubber toys, rubber bands and pencil erasers are just a few of the most common products that contain latex.
 - Health care workers are at risk of developing a latex allergy because they use latex gloves frequently. Workers with less glove use (such as housekeepers, hairdressers, food handlers and workers in industries that manufacture latex products) are also at risk.
- Latex gloves are effective in preventing transmission of many infectious diseases. But for some workers, exposures to latex may result in allergic reactions.***
- Latex allergies are a reaction to certain proteins found in natural rubber latex, a product made from the rubber tree.
 - Latex allergies may cause itchy skin and hives or even anaphylaxis, a potentially life-threatening condition that can cause throat swelling and severe difficulty breathing.
 - Symptoms may appear after touching latex rubber products. Symptoms can also develop after inhaling latex particles that are released into the air when someone removes latex gloves.
 - Symptoms may be mild such as red/itchy skin, or a rash. More severe symptoms such as runny nose, hives, itchy/watery eyes, scratchy throat, cough, wheezing or trouble breathing may develop.
 - Anaphylaxis is the most serious allergic reaction to latex and can lead to death. An anaphylactic reaction occurs immediately following an exposure to latex in highly sensitive individuals. Anaphylaxis rarely occurs as a result of the initial exposure. **Seek immediate medical attention or call 911 if any of the following symptoms of anaphylaxis are experienced:**
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Hives or swelling
 - Nausea and vomiting
 - Wheezing
 - Drop in blood pressure
 - Dizziness
 - Loss of consciousness
 - Confusion
 - Rapid or weak pulse
 - Healthcare workers and others who are frequently exposed to latex are at a higher risk of developing a latex allergy. People with a personal or family history of allergies and those diagnosed with spina bifida are also at risk.

TIPS FOR PREVENTION

- Detecting symptoms early, reducing exposure to latex and obtaining medical advice are important to prevent long-term health effects. Once a worker becomes allergic to latex, special precautions are needed to prevent exposures. Certain medications may reduce the allergy symptoms; but complete latex avoidance, though quite difficult, is the most effective approach.
- Use non-latex gloves for activities that are not likely to involve contact with infectious materials (food preparation, routine housekeeping, general maintenance, etc.).
- **Appropriate barrier protection is necessary when handling infectious materials.** The best non-latex choice is to use nitrile gloves. If you do use latex gloves, make sure they are powder-free with reduced protein content.
- Use appropriate work practices to reduce the chance of reactions to latex.
 - When wearing latex gloves, do not use oil-based hand creams or lotions (which can cause glove deterioration).
 - After removing latex gloves, wash hands with a mild soap and dry thoroughly.
 - Practice good housekeeping: frequently clean areas and equipment contaminated with latex-containing dust.
- Know your rights. Employers are required by law to adopt policies that protect workers such as:
 - Providing workers with non-latex gloves when their work does not involve exposure to infectious materials.
 - For healthcare workers and others who may come in contact with infectious materials, employers must provide alternative, non-latex personal protective equipment.
 - Provide education programs and training materials about latex allergies to workers.
 - Periodically screen high-risk workers for latex allergy symptoms.
 - Evaluate current strategies whenever a worker is diagnosed with a latex allergy.

For more information, visit the following websites:

www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/98-113/default.html;

www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/latex-allergy/symptoms-causes/syc-20374287#:~:text=Latex%20allergy%20may%20cause%20itchy,of%20developing%20a%20latex%20allergy

Sources: US Dept. of Labor/OSHA; CDC; Mayo Clinic

