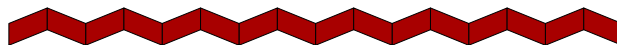




# LATEX ALLERGY



## Safety & Security Fact Sheet

### ✓ WHAT IS LATEX?

Natural rubber latex is the milky sap that comes from rubber trees. Natural rubber latex contains certain proteins that may trigger an immune response in a hypersensitive individual. This hypersensitivity reaction is similar to that associated with bee stings, poison ivy, and peanuts. Natural rubber latex products are pervasive. Latex can be found in disposable gloves and other common medical (clinic) supplies, chewing gum, balloons, koosh balls, underwear elastic, erasers, rubber bands, mouse pads, and rubber toys. The word latex is also used to describe synthetic (butyl- or petroleum-based) rubber products and water-soluble paints. These products do not contain the natural proteins that produce the hypersensitivity reaction.

### ✓ WHAT IS LATEX ALLERGY?

Latex allergy can result from repeated exposures to proteins in natural rubber latex through skin contact or inhalation (the proteins can adhere to airborne glove powder). Not everyone will be affected by the latex allergens. The most common reaction to latex products is **irritant contact dermatitis**, the development of dry, itchy, reddened skin--especially on the hands. This reaction is caused by irritation from wearing gloves and by exposure to the powder (usually cornstarch) added to them. **Chemical sensitivity dermatitis** results from the chemicals added to latex during harvesting, processing, or manufacturing. These chemicals can cause sores and blisters similar to those caused by poison ivy. Neither irritant contact dermatitis nor chemical sensitivity dermatitis is a true allergy. **Immediate hypersensitivity** is a true allergic response brought about by a specific antibody. On the skin, this is evident as hives that erupt even where there has been no direct contact with latex. Systemic allergic symptoms can include itchy eyes, swollen lips or tongue, dizziness, and respiratory symptoms, including asthma. Rarely, anaphylaxis (hypotension and shock) may occur. **A life-threatening reaction is seldom the first sign of latex allergy.**

### ✓ CAN ANYONE BE ALLERGIC TO LATEX? WHO IS AT RISK?

The amount of latex exposure needed to produce sensitization or an allergic reaction is not known. Increasing the exposure to latex proteins increases the risk of developing allergic symptoms and the seriousness of the response. Children who have had numerous operations, particularly children with spina bifida, are at highest risk. Persons at increased risk include workers with ongoing latex exposure, especially persons with a tendency to have multiple allergic conditions. Latex allergy is also associated with a cross-sensitivity to certain foods such as avocados, potatoes, bananas, tomatoes, chestnuts, kiwi fruit, and papaya.

### ✓ HOW CAN LATEX ALLERGY BE AVOIDED?

Use vinyl gloves whenever caring for children with spina bifida. Remember that prolonged exposure to latex may result in sensitization. After removing latex gloves, wash hands thoroughly. Learn to recognize the early signs of latex allergy. Carefully watch children under your care. If a sensitivity reaction seems to be developing, discontinue the use of latex gloves and latex products and avoid inhaling the powder from gloves worn by others. Identify the products containing latex and seek nonlatex alternatives. Report any suspicion to your supervisor and consult with your physician.

### ✓ ARE NONLATEX GLOVES READILY AVAILABLE?

Vinyl examination gloves, in boxes of 100, may be ordered from the online supply catalog in boxes of 100 using the following FCINs: 3842035013 (large), 3842035012 (medium), and 3842035011 (small).

or visit

[www.execpc.com/~alert/](http://www.execpc.com/~alert/)

If you need assistance, call the safety section at 571-423-2010.