

Latex Allergy Information

What is latex allergy?

Some adults have an allergy or sensitivity to latex rubber. Reactions can be seen when products made from latex come in contact with the person's skin, mucous membranes, or the bloodstream. Some people may react when blowing up a rubber balloon or breathing in powder from the inside of latex gloves.

Latex allergy occurs when the body's immune system reacts to proteins found in latex. Latex is most often associated with disposable gloves, but may be found in hundreds of other products both within a healthcare or laboratory setting, and in normal daily life.

This information is designed to assist in the management of latex sensitization among WPI lab workers (faculty, staff and students), health care personnel, and cleaning and maintenance personnel, and to help protect against undue latex exposure.

What are the symptoms of a latex allergy?

When a person has contact with products that contain latex you may see watery or itchy eyes, wheezing, hives, flushing or a skin rash, itching or swelling. In some cases, severe reactions (anaphylactic shock) can occur in which the person may have problems breathing, experience chest tightness, or have swelling of his/her throat or tongue. Severe reactions require prompt emergency treatment.

Who is at risk for developing latex allergy?

People who have an allergy to certain food may also have a latex allergy. Both the food and the latex may have some of the same proteins. Commonly eaten foods which contain some of the same proteins as latex include: bananas, avocados, chestnuts, kiwi, passion fruit, papaya, figs, peaches, nectarines, plums, tomatoes and celery.

What to avoid if allergic to latex?

Many items in the home, and at work, are made of latex; a partial list includes:

At Home & Community

Balloons
Condoms

At Work

Disposable gloves
Blood pressure cuffs

Beach toys
Latex paint

Syringes
Tubing

Any item that can be stretched and is light brown in color may contain latex. There are items that can be used in place of the items that contain latex. They are made of vinyl, plastic or silicone.

If you are allergic to latex:

- Avoid ALL latex products at home and at work. Use only items that do not contain latex.
- Know what to do in case of emergency. Discuss this with your physician.
- Use a Medic-Alert bracelet or necklace.
- Carry a pair of non-latex gloves with you, information about latex allergies, and a note from your physician.
- Be sure your local hospital has a record of your latex allergy, in the event that you need services.
- Avoid areas where you may inhale latex molecules from healthcare workers.

WPI Environmental and Occupational Safety (EOS) Recommendation

EOS recommends that latex gloves not be used in campus facilities, including laboratories, health centers and in cleaning and maintenance operations. The use of gloves made of other material, such as nitrile and vinyl, should be considered. Vendors such as Fisher Scientific (1-800-766-7000), or VWR Scientific (1-800-932-5000), have a wide variety of non-latex, disposable gloves available at competitive pricing.

Additional information about latex allergy is available at:

- www.cdc.gov/niosh/latexalt.html
- www.osha.gov/SLTC/latexallergy/index.html
- www.latexallergyresources.org

For further health and safety information, contact the EOS Office at x 5216, or visit the EOS homepage at www.wpi.edu/Admin/Safety.

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