

ALLERGIC REACTIONS TO LATEX

Most people who encounter latex products have no health problems, but some workers, continually exposed to latex gloves and other products containing natural rubber latex, develop allergic reactions. Those who work where latex products are manufactured or who has multiple allergic conditions may also be affected. A latex allergy can result in serious health problems.

Workers with ongoing exposure to natural rubber latex should follow the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) recommendations which include: reducing exposure, using appropriate work practices, training and education, monitoring symptoms, and when possible, substituting non-latex products. You can take steps to avoid or minimizing allergic reactions to natural rubber latex.

Learn to recognize latex allergy symptoms, which include skin rashes; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, or sinus irritations; asthma, and (rarely) shock. If allergy symptoms develop, avoid direct contact with latex products until a doctor experienced in latex allergies sees you. If you have a latex allergy, tell your employer, physicians, nurses and dentists and wear a medical alert bracelet. Workers with latex allergy should talk to a doctor about precautions in areas where powder from latex gloves worn by others might be inhaled. High-risk workers should be periodically screened for latex allergy symptoms.

Non-latex gloves should be used when contact with infectious materials is not likely (food preparation, routine housekeeping, maintenance, etc.). If latex gloves are required, use powder-free gloves with reduced protein content. When wearing latex gloves, don't use oil-based hand creams or lotions unless they reduce latex-related problems. After removing latex gloves, wash hands with a mild soap and dry thoroughly.

Identify and frequently clean work areas contaminated with latex dust (upholstery, carpets, ventilation ducts, and plenums). Frequently change ventilation filters and vacuum bags used in latex-contaminate areas. Prevention strategies should be evaluated whenever a worker is diagnosed with a latex allergy.