Latex Allergy
What is latex?

- The term “latex” refers to natural rubber latex, the product manufactured from a milky fluid derived from the rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*.

- Several types of synthetic rubber are also referred to as "latex," but these do not cause allergic reactions.
What products contain natural rubber latex?

- Disposable gloves
- Surgical masks
- Airway & IV tubing
- Syringes
- Stethoscopes
- Catheters
- Dressings & bandages
- 40,000 consumer products (e.g. balloons, condoms, athletic shoe soles, rubber toys, nipples and pacifiers, etc.)
- Components of Human Patient Simulators (such as IV tubing, etc.)
Latex Allergy

- Latex allergy is a reaction to certain proteins in latex rubber.
- Health care workers are at risk of latex allergies.
- For some individuals, exposure to latex products, such as powdered latex exam gloves, can cause a mild to severe allergic reaction.
- Airborne powder from gloves can cause reactions in some sensitive individuals.
Persons at increased risk for latex allergies

- Healthcare workers
- Individuals with occupational exposure (e.g., from frequent use of latex gloves)
- Individuals requiring frequent bladder catheterization
- Individuals with neural tube defects (e.g., spina bifida, myelomeningocele)
- Individuals who have had multiple surgeries
- Individuals with multiple allergies (especially to balloons or other latex products)
- Individuals with a history of anaphylactic reactions during surgery
- Individuals with allergies to foods such as banana, avocado, chestnut, kiwi, potato, tomato and related foods
Exposure to Latex

- Frequent exposure to latex causes one to become sensitized.
- Sensitization then puts one at risk for allergic reaction.
- Sensitization occurs through:
  - Direct skin contact;
  - Latex particles dispersed into the air when powered gloves are taken off.
Latex Allergy Reactions

- Skin rash and inflammation
- Hives
- Flushing
- Itching
- Nasal, eye, or sinus symptoms
- Respiratory irritation
- Asthma
- Shock (rare)
Other Types of Latex Reactions

- Irritant contact dermatitis: Dry, itchy, irritated areas on skin.
  - Caused by irritation from wearing gloves and by exposure to the powders added to them.

- Chemical sensitivity dermatitis: Skin rash similar to poison ivy.
  - Results from chemicals added to latex during harvesting, processing, or manufacturing.
Protection from Latex Exposure and Allergy

- Use non-latex gloves for activities that will not involve direct contact with infectious material.
- If you must use latex gloves, use powder-free latex gloves.
- Do not use oil-based hand creams or lotions with latex gloves. The lotion can deteriorate the gloves.
- Wash and dry hands thoroughly after removing latex gloves.
- Clean any areas contaminated with latex dust.
- Become familiar with protocols for preventing latex allergy.
- Learn to recognize symptoms of latex allergy.
What should you do if you think you have a Latex Allergy?

- If you develop symptoms of latex allergy, avoid direct contact with latex and other latex-containing products until you can see a physician experienced in treating latex allergy.

- If you have latex allergy, consult your physician regarding the following precautions:
  - Avoiding contact with latex gloves and products.
  - Avoiding areas where you might inhale the powder from latex products used by other workers.
  - Informing your health profession program that you are allergic to latex.
Avoidance of Latex

- Is the only means to assure prevention of a latex allergy, and
- Is the only protection from allergic symptoms for a person who has already developed a latex allergy.
How is Latex Allergy Treated?

- Detecting symptoms early, reducing exposure to latex, and obtaining medical advice are important to prevent long-term health effects.
- Certain medications may reduce allergy symptoms but complete latex avoidance is the most effective approach.
REMEMBER

- Immediately report signs and symptoms of a latex allergy or sensitivity to your clinical instructor, preceptor, or supervisor.

- If you have a known allergy it is important to remember that “Latex Contained” and “Latex Reduced” areas do NOT indicate latex free and it is your responsibility to protect yourself.
Patient/Resident Care Guidelines

- On admission, ask patients/residents if they have a sensitivity or allergy to latex.
- Remove all latex containing products from the patient’s/resident’s room.
- Follow the health care organization’s policy for Latex Allergy.
References


Additional Resources:
- American Latex Allergy Association: www.latexallergyresources.org
- OSHA: www.osha.gov