



## **Latex Allergies** General Information

### **What is Latex?**

Latex is a natural rubber that comes from a liquid in tropical rubber trees (*Hevea brasiliensis*). Latex-containing items are found in many household and medical objects. Some of the more common items that contain latex are:

#### **Nonmedical Items**

Balloons  
Rubber balls or toys  
Art supplies  
Condoms  
Diapers and elastic clothing

#### **Medical Items**

Gloves  
Tape and elastic bandages  
Occupational therapy elastic bands  
Wheelchair cushions or tires  
Crutch pads

### **What is latex allergy?**

Allergic responses can occur when latex-containing products touch skin or mucous membranes. Latex contains a protein that can cause allergic reactions in some people. Items that are made of thin stretchy rubber such as gloves, balloons and condoms are particularly high in this protein, and may cause more allergic reactions than items made of hard rubber (like tires). It is estimated that between 1 and 6% of the general population may be allergic to latex. There is no cure for latex allergy; the best way to prevent an allergic reaction is to avoid contact with latex-containing products.

### **What does latex allergy look like?**

Symptoms of latex allergy range from mild to severe. They may include:

- ❖ Itchy, watery eyes
- ❖ Sneezing
- ❖ Runny nose
- ❖ Wheezing, coughing
- ❖ Rash/hives
- ❖ Swelling of mucous membranes
- ❖ Bumps, sores, cracks or welts may appear on the hands of those who work in latex gloves.
- ❖ **More severe symptoms are chest tightness, shortness of breath and anaphylactic shock.**

**A LIFE-THREATENING ALLERGIC REACTION IS POSSIBLE IN A PERSON WHO HAS HAD NO PREVIOUS WARNINGS OR SYMPTOMS!**

### **Who is at risk for latex allergies?**

Anyone can become allergic to latex. At higher risk are children with spina bifida or those who have had frequent urogenital surgeries and/or catheterizations and are often exposed to latex products. People who have had multiple surgical procedures, suffer from many allergies, are health care workers or work in the rubber industry are also at increased risk.

### **Latex Allergy Resources**

- ❖ American Latex Allergy Association <http://www.latexallergyresources.org/>
- ❖ Asthma and Allergy Association of America  
<http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=9&sub=21&cont=383>
- ❖ Medline Plus <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/latexallergy.html>