

Latex Allergy Fact Sheet

Latex is made from a milky substance retrieved from the hevea brasiliensis rubber tree. These trees are only found in Africa and Southeast Asia. Many chemicals are added during the manufacturing of this milky substance. These additives can cause a contact reaction in the form of a rash to sensitive persons. Some types of synthetic rubbers are labeled as latex even though they do not release the allergic causing proteins as natural rubber latex does.

There are two types of latex reactions that are not classified as true latex allergies.

1. **Contact Dermatitis.**

This is the most common reaction to any latex containing product. This irritant contact dermatitis is presented as irritated, dry, itchy skin. This occurs only when the latex comes into contact with the skin. This reaction may be complicated by exposure to other materials and chemicals in the workplace. Repeated hand washing and drying and/or incomplete hand drying, use of cleaners and sanitizes, and exposure to powders added to the gloves may also induce this irritation.

2. **Chemical Sensitivity Dermatitis, Delayed Hypersensitivity or Type IV Hypersensitivity.**

This reaction is due to the chemicals added to the latex during processing. A rash will occur within 24-48 hours. This rash resembles poison ivy. The rash may progress into blisters and spread away from the point of contact. Symptoms may worsen after each exposure.

Type I Hypersensitivity or IgE antibody-mediated allergic reaction

This is a True Latex Allergy, and is very serious. This reaction can occur in persons who have previously been sensitized. Symptoms can begin within minutes to hours after latex exposure. Reactions can vary from mild to severe. Mild symptoms may only display red skin with hives and or itching. Symptoms may progress to more severe, such as: respiratory symptoms, wheezing, shortness of breath, scratchy throat, asthma, rhinitis, headache, dizziness, tachycardia, hypotension, edema of lips, eyes and throat, abdominal pain and sneezing. And on rare occasions, the most severe, Shock.

Routes of Exposure:

The primary routes of exposure to natural rubber latex products that have resulted in dermatitis and/or systemic reactions include:

1. Cutaneous/Dermal
2. Mucous membrane
3. Inhalation

Persons at greater risk for development of latex allergy include:

1. Anyone with Spina bifida and congenital urinary tract problems
2. Health care workers
3. Food handlers and others with occupational exposure
4. Anyone with multiple medical problems and multiple surgeries
5. Anyone with certain food allergies: apple, apricots, avocado, bananas, carrots, celery, cherry, chestnuts, fig, grapes, hazelnut, kiwi, melon, milk, mugwort, nectarine, papaya, passion fruit, peaches, pears, pineapple, plum, poinsettia, raw potatoes, rye, tomatoes and wheat.