

Latex Allergy in the Hospital

What is a latex allergy?

Latex is found in a variety of products, from everyday household items to many articles used in routine medical and dental care. An allergic reaction to natural rubber latex is actually a reaction to a protein contained in the sap of the Brazilian rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*). This sap is used in manufacturing latex products.

Who is at risk to develop latex allergy?

- People with spina bifida
- Health care workers such as: doctors, nurses, surgical staff, dentists, dental hygienists, emergency medical services personnel, lab technicians
- People with other types of allergies or asthma
- People who have had many surgeries or medical procedures
- Rubber industry workers: those working in tire factories, rubber manufacturing and glove manufacturing

What are some of the symptoms of latex allergy?

- Skin rash or itching (generally on the hands)
- Hives
- Swollen red skin
- Swollen lips and tongue with difficulty breathing, wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Abdominal (belly) pain
- Diarrhea

In very rare cases people with a latex allergy may suffer an anaphylactic shock, a severe allergic reaction that may be life threatening.

Symptoms of anaphylaxis shock include:

- Throat hoarseness or swelling
- Persistent wheezing
- Fainting
- Low blood pressure

The risk of anaphylactic shock seems to be greatest in people who have had:

- Previous allergic reactions to products that contain latex.
- Prior anaphylaxis with an unknown cause.

What is the treatment?

Certain medications may reduce allergy symptoms but the most effective approach is to reduce exposure to latex products.

How can I avoid exposure to latex in the hospital?

Many hospital items and supplies contain latex. It is important to alert your medical team to your allergy to latex or past experience with latex. The University of Michigan Hospitals and Health Center take the following precautions to reduce exposure to latex in people with a known latex allergy:

- Posting a sign on your door and adding notes in the medical record to alert all staff to your allergy.
- Using equipment that is made with vinyl or silicone instead of latex.
- Covering equipment, such as stethoscopes and blood pressure cuffs so that they do not touch your skin.
- Removing latex gloves or other items that contain latex from your room.
- Avoiding latex when preparing your medicines and food.

Where can I learn more?

- FDA. Don't be Misled by "Latex Free" Claims. Access at:
<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm342641.htm>
- American Latex Allergy Association. Access at:
<http://latexallergyresources.org/>
- American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. **Latex Allergy.**
Access at: <http://acaai.org/allergies/types/skin-allergies/latex-allergy>

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Approved by: Patient Safety Committee

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