

## What is Latex?

In the context of latex allergy, 'latex' refers to natural rubber latex, which comes from the Hevea brasiliensis tree, grown mainly in Thailand and Malaysia

## What does it contain?

Mainly water and rubber hydrocarbon, along with sugar, resins and **proteins**, which cause the **allergy**

## Why do people become allergic to Latex

It is probably a combination of two things

1. **An in-built constitutional tendency** associated with asthma, hay fever and eczema along with
2. **Increasing exposure to latex-containing products**

## What symptoms can Latex allergy cause?

This is variable, depending on severity of allergy and route of exposure (direct contact or airborne) - **symptoms generally appear within 30 minutes**

- Itching and swelling at site of contact
- Itchy / runny nose with sneezing
- Itchy watery eyes
- Itch and swelling of mouth, tongue, throat
- Wheezing
- Rarely anaphylaxis (breathing difficulty / collapse)

## Can Latex be life-threatening?

There have been deaths caused by this allergy. This is a very rare event, but even just its possibility requires it to be taken seriously. The most important things to do are

1. **Avoid unnecessary contact with latex**
2. **Be aware of the main dangers** – see next box
3. **Seek medical advice if latex exposure causes**

## **WHEEZING TONGUE or THROAT SWELLING or IF YOU FEEL UNWELL, eg FAINT OR DIZZY**

This **may** mean that you require to carry rescue treatment in case of a severe allergic reaction, **but only your doctor can make this decision**

## What are the main dangers for me?

Latex is more of a problem for allergic individuals when it contacts a mucosal surface (such as mouth, nose or genitalia) than intact skin. This may occur either by

**DIRECT CONTACT** eg blowing up balloons, condom and diaphragm contraceptives, or the glove of a dentist, surgeon or gynaecologist

or when **BREATHED IN** from airborne carriage of latex particles, such as occurs with powdered gloves or balloons

In this situation, symptoms may proceed quickly due to rapid absorption of the latex allergen

## What sort of things contain Latex

Many consumer and healthcare products may contain latex, and sometimes it crops up in unlikely places. But don't worry, lists are readily available from support groups and websites, and you should make it a priority to access these to learn where latex may be present.



In general, 'stretchy' rubber products such as gloves or rubber bands are much more likely to be a problem than 'hard' ones such as tyres, which



contain little protein.

## Fruit and Vegetables

Some people with latex allergy also react to certain fruits and vegetables, such as banana, kiwi, avocado, tomato or potato. This is because these foods and latex contain similar proteins, which can cross-react

It can sometimes be difficult to be certain which allergy came first – the latex or the food

Reactions may also be caused by any food which has been handled by people wearing latex gloves, eg in



restaurants, canteens and packing facilities

### Health Care Settings

Latex is widely used in healthcare settings because it gives such good protection against infections. So you have to be on special guard here, by following this advice carefully -

**INFORM** the following of your allergy. Make sure they appreciate its significance and that they know how to manage your allergy safely. If necessary, show this leaflet

- **Hospital doctor**
- **Family doctor**
- **Dentist**
- **Nurse**
- **Radiographer**
- **Chiropodist**
- **Physiotherapist**

**ESPECIALLY** if you are undergoing an

- **Operation Internal examination**
- **X-ray procedure Catheterisation**
- **where special precautions will be necessary**

**INSIST** that you are **NOT** examined by **ANYONE** who wears latex gloves

**CONSIDER** carrying with you

- **Latex-free gloves** - nitrile or vinyl
- **Medicalert bracelet or necklace**

stating 'allergic to natural rubber latex'

**REMIND** the doctor, nurse or dentist that certain injection vials may contain rubber bungs or stoppers, eg **Local anaesthetics, Vaccines**

**Remember the following:**

- **Pharmacist**
- **Hairdresser**
- **Beautician**

- **Employer**
- **Garage (servicing)**
- **School**
- **Relatives and Friends**

### UK NATIONAL SUPPORT GROUPS

#### Latex Allergy Support Group

PO Box 27

Filey YO14 9YH

**Helpline 07071 225838 (7-10pm Mon-Fri)**

[www.lasg.co.uk](http://www.lasg.co.uk)

#### The Anaphylaxis Campaign

PO Box 275

Farnborough

Hampshire GU14 6SX

**Tel 01252 542029**

[www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/)

#### Allergy UK

[www.allergyuk.org/](http://www.allergyuk.org/)

### EMERGENCY BRACELETS

#### MedicAlert

[www.medicalert.co.uk](http://www.medicalert.co.uk)

**Tel 0207 833 3034**

### WEBSITES

#### Latex allergy links

[www.latexallergylinks.tripod.com/](http://www.latexallergylinks.tripod.com/)

#### Interactive health tutorial

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/latexallergies.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/latexallergies.html)

#### American Latex Allergy Association

[www.latexallergyresources.org/](http://www.latexallergyresources.org/)

This leaflet is intended only for general information. Please contact your own doctor or clinic for further advice.

June 2003

# Patient Information Leaflet



# LATEX ALLERGY

