American Latex Allergy Association

Latex Allergy Solutions Sheet

Latex allergy is a reaction to certain proteins in latex rubber. The amount of latex exposure needed to produce sensitization or an allergic reaction is unknown. Increasing the exposure to latex proteins increases the risk of developing allergic symptoms.

Potential Hazard

Exposure of restaurant workers to latex allergy from wearing latex gloves while performing cleaning processes or while handling or preparing food. Exposure to latex for some workers may result in skin rashes, hives, flushing, itching, nasal, eye, or sinus symptoms, asthma; and (rarely) shock. Exposure to latex can also cause irritant contact dermatitis and allergic sensitivity dermatitis.

- Irritant Contact Dermatitis - the development of dry, itchy, irritated areas on the skin, usually the hands. This reaction is caused by irritation from wearing gloves and by exposure to the powders added to them.

- Allergic Dermatitis - results from exposure to the chemicals added to latex during harvesting, processing, or manufacturing. These chemicals can cause a skin rash similar to that of poison ivy.

- Hypersensitivity reaction - a response to natural rubber latex that results in a range of symptoms from hives to wheezing to shock. This is a rare occurrence in the general population (1-6 percent) but is very serious when it does occur. It can develop over a period of months to years, but once symptoms occur, they can progress in a matter of minutes.

Possible Solutions

Teen Worker Solutions

Employers have the primary responsibility for protecting the safety and health of their workers. Employees are responsible for following the safe work practices of their employers.

- Use appropriate gloves for the tasks in clean-up. Use heavy-duty non-natural rubber latex gloves that will protect you from chemicals and sharp objects.
- Learn to recognize the symptoms of latex allergy: skin rashes; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, or sinus symptoms; asthma; and shock.
- Seek early medical diagnosis if you notice any symptoms, and use gloves that match the diagnosis.
- After removing latex gloves, wash your hands with a mild soap and dry thoroughly.

Employer Solutions

Employers have the primary responsibility for protecting the safety and health of their workers. Employees are responsible for following the safe work practices of their employers.
Consider implementing recommended safe work practices, including:

- Provide appropriate, heavy-duty, non-natural rubber latex gloves that will protect the teen worker against chemicals and sharps.
- Provide alternative (non-latex) gloves for those who are latex sensitive.
- If you use latex gloves, use gloves that are powder-free and low in protein and chemical allergens.

Additional Resources
Latex Allergy, Technical Links Page.
Latex Allergy - A Prevention Guide. DHHS (NIOSH) No. 98-113.
Potential for Allergy to Natural Rubber Latex Gloves and other Natural Rubber Products. OSHA Technical Information Bulletin (1999, April 12), 9 pages.
NIOSH Alert Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex in the Workplace. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 97-135, June 1997.

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