American Latex Allergy Association

Patient/Public Education: Fast Facts

Latex Allergy

Key Facts

- Allergic reactions have primarily been caused by dipped latex products, especially gloves, balloons and condoms. Products made from crepe rubber, such as soles of shoes, are less likely to cause reactions.
- Contact dermatitis, a poison ivy-like rash appears 12-36 hours after contact with latex. This is most common on the hands of people who wear rubber gloves, but may occur on other parts of the body following contact with latex.
- Immediate or IgE antibody-mediated allergic reactions are potentially the most serious form of allergic reaction to latex. Like other common forms of allergy, these reactions occur in people who have previously become sensitized.
- With re-exposure, symptoms such as itching, redness, swelling, sneezing, and wheezing may occur. Rarely, anaphylaxis or life-threatening symptoms, such as severe trouble breathing and loss of blood pressure, are caused by latex exposure.
- The capacity of latex products, especially gloves, to cause allergic reactions varies enormously, partly by brand and partly by production lot.
- Certain individuals, including health care workers who wear latex gloves and children with spina bifida who have had multiple surgical procedures, are at particularly high risk for allergic reactions to latex. Atopic individuals (those with allergies) are at an increased risk of developing latex allergy.

Statistics

- Estimates of the prevalence of allergy to latex allergens in the general population vary widely, from less than 1 percent to 6 percent.
- Approximately 220 cases of anaphylaxis and 3 deaths per year are due to latex allergy.
- The most severe reactions reported have occurred in health care settings, where 10 to 17 percent of health care workers have latex allergies.

New Research

- Latex Allergy: Difference between surgical gloves and examination gloves (JACI Aug. 2004; Brown, MD, et. al).

Additional Resources

- **The ADVOCATE Patient Newsletter article: Fall 2000 - Latex Allergy** [1]
- **Latex Allergy Tips Brochure** [2]
- **The Allergy Report - Latex Allergy** [3]

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