



Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Canada  
Association de Spina-bifida et d'hydrocéphalie du Canada

## LATEX ALLERGIES

### Questions and Answers

#### What is it?

Latex is a natural product made from the milky sap of the rubber tree (*Hevea Brasillienus*). Its durability, flexibility and low manufacturing costs has made latex a popular material.

A latex allergy is a reaction to products made from natural rubber latex. The reactive is proteins originating from the rubber tree and present in products made of natural rubber latex.

#### Causes

Allergies develop when the immune system reacts to the proteins as if they were harmful. Extended exposure builds antibodies which build up in the immune system. The antibodies "attack" the proteins with powerful chemicals causing an allergic reaction.

Latex exposure occurs through:

- Contact with skin or mucous membranes (eyes, mouth, genitals, bladder or rectum)
- Breathing dust particles containing latex proteins.

#### Who is at Risk?

Anyone who comes in contact with latex has some risk of developing latex allergies. People with extended exposure who may pose higher risk include:

- Patients whose regular care involves latex
- Healthcare workers
- People who work with other latex products

Persons with Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus, congenital urological abnormalities, cerebral palsy and Dandy-Walker syndrome are all at particular risk due to repeated exposure during surgical procedures and at home care associated with these disabilities (catheterization may also put people at risk)

#### Symptoms

There are varying severities of allergic reaction: Mild reaction symptoms may include:

- skin rash
- hives
- itchy, watery eyes
- runny nose
- redness in area where contact occurred

More serious reaction symptoms may include:

- drop in blood pressure
- rapid heart rate
- swelling of the throat
- wheezing and difficulty breathing
- flushed face

#### Products containing Latex

Latex is found in several products around the home and health care setting:

- latex/rubber gloves
- catheters
- blood pressure cuffs
- rubber top vials
- tourniquets
- IV injection ports
- IV tubing
- Enema tips
- Anesthesia masks
- Feeding tubes
- Balloons
- Carpet backing
- Condoms and diaphragms
- Elastic on socks and other clothing
- Bandages
- Water toys
- Handgrips on racquets and tools
- Erasers
- Glue
- Pens and crayons
- Plants (rubber tree and poinsettia)

For more information contact:

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## Cross-reference Allergies

Seven proteins have been identified in latex and some are structurally similar and “cross-reactive” with proteins in certain fruits. It is recommended that patients allergic to these fruits caution for potential latex allergy.

Bananas	Papaya
Avocados	Peaches
Chestnuts	Kiwi
Apples	Potatoes
Carrots	Melons
Celery	Walnuts
Tomatoes	Peanuts

*Please check with your medical professional as the list may not be complete.*

## Identifying Latex Allergies

Identifying sensitivity comes from a review of medical history, physical examination and blood evaluation. Three FDA approved tests for latex specific IgE antibodies (immunoassays) are:

Pharmacia & Upjohn CAP system  
Diagnostic Products' Alastat  
Hycor Assay  
Latex reagent diagnostic skin testing

## Living with Latex Allergies

If you live with a latex allergy you are encouraged to take the following precautions:

Carry and adrenaline kit (Ana-kit or Epi-Pen) to treat possible severe reactions

Use a Medic-Alert bracelet

Carry a pair of latex free gloves in case of emergency

Always inform your Doctor of latex concerns prior to surgical procedures so special precautions can be taken.

It is possible that a mild reaction and repeated exposure may develop into a more severe reaction.

A severe allergic reaction may occur without previous reactions.

The best treatment for latex allergies is avoidance

## For Further Information

For more information on Latex Allergies and latex-free products contact the following organizations:

[Latexallergyresources.org](http://Latexallergyresources.org)

[Latexallergylinks.tripod.com](http://Latexallergylinks.tripod.com)

[Decentexposures.com](http://Decentexposures.com)

Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Canada / Association de Spina-bifida et d'hydrocéphalie du Canada [www.sbhac.ca](http://www.sbhac.ca)

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