

# Latex Allergy

One of the most recently discovered allergic reactions is to natural latex rubber. Latex is a substance that can be found in balloons, elastic straps, condoms, diaphragms, rubber bands, rubber toys, tubing, and surgical gloves—to name just a few items. Latex can cause hives where it contacts the skin of an individual allergic to latex. For instance, this symptom is commonly seen on the hands of allergic people who wear rubber gloves. The rash usually breaks out within 45 minutes after contact, but is usually not life threatening; however, the person can get itchy eyes, have hives appear all over the body, and even have trouble breathing right after being exposed. Latex can even cause the person to pass out from a drop in blood pressure.

If you think that you might be allergic to latex, ask yourself these three questions:

1. Have you ever had a rash, hives, runny nose, itchy eyes, or wheezing right after blowing up balloons or after wearing rubber gloves?
2. Have you ever had itching, swelling, or wheezing right after a dental or surgical procedure?
3. Have you ever had an unexplained drop in blood pressure or unexplained allergic reaction during an operation?

If you've had any of these symptoms, you should tell your allergist, dermatologist, primary doctor, or nurse practitioner. He or she may have you checked for latex allergy.

Certain people need to be very careful about latex allergy, including:

- medical workers and others who often wear powdered, latex gloves at work, as well as people who work making rubber products
- people who have had many operations early in life, such as children with Spina Bifida
- people who were born with genital problems needing urinary catheterization or surgery
- people who have had repeated abdominal operations
- people who are allergic to bananas, kiwis, avocados, chestnuts, or hazelnuts and get hives or throat swelling immediately after eating these foods

What should you do if you are allergic to latex?

For starters, you'll want to try to avoid all natural rubber products—*especially* during medical or dental procedures. You can further protect yourself by following these six tips:

1. Wear a medic-alert bracelet.
2. Keep an adrenaline kit and non-latex gloves with you.
3. Make sure "latex allergy" is marked in your medical chart.
4. Remind your doctor or dentist about your latex allergy *before* your visit and bring non latex gloves with you.
5. Talk with your doctor *before* surgery about a latex-safe operating room.
6. If you are a medical professional, switch to non-latex or synthetic gloves.

Talk to your doctor or other medical professional to learn how to get a medic-alert bracelet or adrenaline kit.

Here's a list of common household products that often contain latex:

- balloons
- condoms
- diaphragms
- carpet backing;
- elastic straps on clothing
- erasers
- rubber toys
- pacifiers
- bottle nipples
- dish washing gloves
- diapers
- rubber pants
- incontinence pads

(Note: Latex paint does not contain natural rubber latex.)

If you're a medical professional, you should be aware of these common latex products found in the clinic setting. These include:

- blood pressure cuffs
- catheters
- stethoscope tubing
- IV bags
- latex gloves
- disposable syringes
- crutch tips/hand grips
- adhesive tape

While we don't yet have a cure for latex allergy, you can protect yourself by following all the tips mentioned here. Additionally, you should discuss your specific symptoms with your doctor or other medical professional. If you experience wheezing, itching, flushing of the face—*immediately after coming into contact with latex*—you should call 911. Afterwards, make sure that this information is added to your medical chart.

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**For more health information ...**

- Connect to our Web site at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org)
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- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.

Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.

If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. When you have an emergency medical condition, we cover emergency care from Plan providers and non-Plan providers anywhere in the world.

An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or serious impairment or dysfunction of your bodily functions or organs; or, (2) when you are in active labor and there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to your or your unborn child's health and safety.