

Latex Allergy

Latex is a natural rubber material, made from the rubber tree. It can be found in many items such as balloons, elastic straps, condoms, diaphragms, rubber bands, rubber toys, tubing, and surgical gloves. Allergy to latex is common and can cause a range of reactions, from mild to life-threatening. It occurs when your body mistakes latex for another harmful material. Your immune system then releases antibodies which cause the allergic reaction. Latex can cause hives (a rash) where it has come in contact with the skin of someone who is allergic. The rash usually breaks out within about 45 minutes after contact, but is usually not life-threatening. However, someone who is allergic to latex can also have itchy eyes, develop hives all over the body, and even have trouble breathing right after being exposed. In severe cases, latex can cause a person to pass out due to a drop in blood pressure.

How do I know if I am allergic to latex?

If you think that you might be allergic to latex, ask yourself if you have ever had:

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

If you've had any of these symptoms, you should talk with your doctor or health care professional. He or she may have you checked for latex allergy.

Certain people need to be especially careful about latex allergy, including the following:

- 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 several 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 I do if I am allergic to latex?

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

1. Consider carrying some kind of medical identification, like a **medic-alert bracelet**. For more information, call 1-888-663-4298 or go to **MedicAlert.org**.
2. Keep an adrenaline kit and non-latex gloves with you. Talk to your doctor or other health care professional to learn how to get an adrenaline kit.
3. Make sure “latex allergy” is marked in your medical record.
4. Remind your doctor or dentist about your latex allergy *before* your visit and bring non-latex gloves with you.

5. If you are having surgery, talk with your doctor *beforehand* about a latex-safe operating room.
6. If you are a health care professional, switch to non-latex or synthetic gloves.

Common household products that often contain latex include:

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| • balloons | • pacifiers | <i>(Note: Latex paint does not contain natural rubber latex.)</i> |
| • condoms | • bottle nipples | |
| • diaphragms | • dish washing gloves | |
| • carpet backing | • diapers | |
| • elastic straps on clothing | • rubber pants | |
| • erasers | • incontinence pads | |
| • rubber toys | | |

If you're a health care professional, you should be aware of common latex products found in the clinical setting. These include:

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

While we don't yet have a cure for latex allergy, you can protect yourself and prevent allergic reactions by taking all of the steps mentioned here. Talk with your doctor or other health care professional about your symptoms. If you experience wheezing, itching, or flushing of the face *immediately after coming into contact with latex*, you should call 911. Then, make sure that this information is added to your medical record.

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Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other 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 health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.

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.