

NIOSH

ALERT

Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex in the Workplace

WARNING!

Workers exposed to latex gloves and other products containing natural rubber latex may develop allergic reactions such as skin rashes; hives; nasal, eye, or sinus symptoms; asthma; and (rarely) shock.

Workers with ongoing exposure to natural rubber latex* should take the following steps to protect themselves:

1. Use nonlatex gloves for activities that are not likely to involve contact with infectious materials (food preparation, routine housekeeping, maintenance, etc.).
2. Appropriate barrier protection is necessary when handling infectious materials.[†] If you choose latex gloves, use powder-free gloves with reduced protein content.[‡]
3. When wearing latex gloves, do not use oil-based hand creams or lotions (which can cause glove deterioration) unless they have been shown to reduce latex-related problems and maintain glove barrier protection.
4. Frequently clean work areas contaminated with latex dust (upholstery, carpets, ventilation ducts, and plenums).
5. Frequently change the ventilation filters and vacuum bags used in latex-contaminated areas.
6. Learn to recognize the symptoms of latex allergy: skin rashes; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, or sinus symptoms; asthma; and shock.
7. If you develop symptoms of latex allergy, avoid direct contact with latex gloves and products until you can see a physician experienced in treating latex allergy.
8. If you have latex allergy, consult your physician regarding the following precautions:
 - Avoid contact with latex gloves and products.
 - Avoid areas where you might inhale the powder from the latex gloves worn by others.
 - Tell your employers, physicians, nurses, and dentists that you have latex allergy.
 - Wear a medical alert bracelet.
9. Take advantage of all latex allergy education and training provided by your employer.

*In this warning sheet, the term "latex" refers to natural rubber latex and includes products made from dry natural rubber. Natural rubber latex is the product manufactured from a milky fluid derived mainly from the rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*.

[†]CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) [1987]. Recommendations for prevention of HIV transmission in health-care settings. MMWR 36(S2).

[‡]The goal of this recommendation is to reduce exposure to allergy-causing proteins (antigens). Until well accepted standardized tests are available, total protein serves as a useful indicator of the exposure of concern.



Dust produced by removing a latex glove containing powder.

For additional information, see ***NIOSH Alert: Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex in the Workplace*** (DHHS [NIOSH] Publication No. 97-135). Single copies of the Alert are available free from the following:

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