

What if I'm Found to be Latex Sensitive?

At present, there is no cure for latex allergy. Prevention, avoidance, and treatment of symptoms are the current options. Once an individual is diagnosed with latex allergy, special precautions should be taken in all areas: at work, at home, and when undergoing dental or medical care.

Although certain medications may reduce allergic symptoms, avoidance of natural rubber latex is the most effective approach. If you are diagnosed with natural rubber latex allergy, it is important to notify your supervisor and your medical and dental care providers immediately.

Because emergency medical equipment and supplies typically contain latex, an individual with latex allergy should wear a med-alert symbol at all times to lessen the risk of life-threatening anaphylactic shock during critical care. Many medical facilities and emergency response teams have latex-safe alternatives for individuals who are sensitive; the key is identifying these individuals. Wearing a med-alert emblem will ensure identification of your sensitivity.⁵

For information on latex allergy testing contact your LabCorp representative, local LabCorp facility, or call Allergy customer service at 800-222-7566 ext 63097

References

1. Delaware Valley Latex Support Network Inc. *Latex Alternative Products List*. Delaware Valley Latex Support Network Inc. http://www.latex.org/information_center.html; 1996.
2. Kelly K. Management of the latex patient. *Immunol Allergy Clin NA*. 1995;139-157.
3. Beezhold DH, Sussman GL, Liss GM, Chang NS. Latex allergy can induce clinical reactions to specific foods. *Clin Exp Allergy*. April 1996;26(4):416-422.
4. Gliniecki CM. Management of latex reactions in the occupational setting. *Am Assn Occupat Health Nurses J*. 1998;46(2):82-93.
5. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. *Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex in the Workplace*. Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health; 1997; 3-9. Publication No. 97-135.

Individuals with latex allergy should wear a med-alert bracelet. This is critical in emergency situations since emergency medical equipment typically contains latex and exposure may induce anaphylactic shock.



How can I Protect Myself?

Use the appropriate glove for the hazard. When engaged in activities in which exposure to biological hazards is unlikely, use nonlatex gloves. These activities include cleaning, food handling, and sorting through paperwork.

To reduce exposure to latex protein and avoid the risk of latex allergy, use powder-free, low-protein, latex gloves when handling biological agents. Hypoallergenic labels found on latex gloves do not certify reduced risk of developing latex allergy; they refer to the level of chemical additives in the gloves that may be associated with contact dermatitis. The FDA now requires manufacturers to remove these labels to avoid this confusion.

Use Appropriate Skin Care Practices. Wash your hands before and after wearing gloves of any kind. Dry your hands thoroughly. This can help cut down on contact dermatitis as well. Never apply oil based creams, lotions, or soaps prior to donning gloves.

Consider reducing your exposure to latex. If you (1) are at high risk for developing latex allergy, (2) have multiple allergies, or (3) have had multiple surgeries, consider reducing your exposure to latex. You may wish to talk to your health care providers about using latex-safe equipment when receiving medical and dental care. Talk to your supervisor or safety officer about latex-safe products for use at work.

Finally, educate yourself in regard to latex allergy and notify your supervisor or safety officer of any concerns you may have regarding latex exposure at work.



Put Us to the Test

www.LabCorp.com

Latex Sensitivity

Could it affect you?





Over 400 latex containing products are commonly used in medical supplies.



Could you be Sensitized?

There are three types of skin reactions associated with latex⁵ These are briefly described below.

- 1. Irritant contact dermatitis.** This condition is characterized by dry, itchy, irritated skin. Although it develops over time, it is not a true allergy. It can be caused by a variety of work-related practices and materials, such as repeated handwashing, inconsistent drying of hands, the use of cleaners and sanitizers, and some powders added to gloves.
- 2. Chemical sensitivity dermatitis (delayed hypersensitivity).** This condition is characterized by poison ivy-like blisters that can appear 24 to 48 hours after contact. The reaction is not so much caused by latex as by the chemicals that may be used to process latex.
- 3. Latex allergy (immediate hypersensitivity).** A true latex reaction, this condition is characterized by itchy eyes and scalp, scratchy throat, and respiratory involvement. Redness and hives may also result. Symptoms occur within minutes of exposure and, in rare cases, these reactions can be life-threatening.

You should suspect that you may be sensitized if you experience certain symptoms immediately after exposure to latex. These symptoms include:

- Skin redness
- Hives (urticaria)
- Runny nose (rhinorrhea)
- Itching at point of contact, eyes, or nose
- Scratchy throat
- Wheezing or asthma
- Collapse or shock

How is Latex Allergy Diagnosed?

A detailed medical history combined with testing is used to diagnose latex allergy. A physician may order latex sensitivity test or, since certain food allergies are associated with latex sensitivity, an allergy profile that checks for sensitivity to latex and certain foods as well.⁴

visit the NIOSH Web site at www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html. LabCorp has employed the use of several of these alternative products already. For instance, our adhesive bandages and vacutainers are latex-safe products.

Several products are made with synthetic latex and these products do not release the proteins that can cause an allergic reaction. For instance, latex house paint contains synthetic latex, so it would not cause a natural rubber latex reaction.

How does Allergy Develop?

The protein in latex is a sensitizer. The amount of exposure needed to cause latex sensitization varies from individual to individual. Some individuals may never react, while others could develop symptoms after minimal exposure. Certain individuals are at higher risk for becoming sensitized.²

- Persons with atopy (a tendency to have multiple allergic conditions), particularly allergies to potato, banana, tomato, kiwi, papaya, avocado, and chestnut³
- Individuals who have had multiple surgeries
- Those who frequently use latex gloves or other latex-containing products.

Exposure occurs each time you come in contact with latex protein, whether blowing up a latex balloon, having a root canal, delivering a baby, or wearing gloves at work. Production materials contained in common disposable latex gloves contain bacterial proteases and endotoxins that can cause skin breakdown and may produce an irritant reaction. This reaction may be interpreted as an allergic reaction. Minimizing your exposure can help decrease your likelihood of sensitization.

Latex protein adheres to the powder in powdered gloves. When these gloves are pulled on and off, latex proteins are released into the air and can result in exposure to the mucous membranes and lungs. LabCorp has discontinued the use of powdered latex gloves to eliminate this source of exposure. LabCorp will phase out the use of all powdered disposable gloves.⁴

Washing your hands **before** putting on gloves is critical. This removes any dirt that may come between the glove and your hand and avoids the irritation and possible skin breakdown that may result in increased latex exposure. Hand washing **before** putting on gloves also removes creams or soaps, such as some shower gels that are oil-based. These oil-based products bind with the proteins in the latex gloves and increase exposure potential.⁵

Likewise, it is also important to wash your hands after removing gloves to wash off any protein that may have adhered to your hands. Keep in mind that one of the most direct routes of exposure is through mucous membranes. If you remove your gloves and then pick up your sandwich without washing your hands, you probably will ingest some latex protein. If you remove your gloves and apply lotion prior to washing your hands, you may have tightly bound those proteins to your skin.



Wash your hands before and after wearing gloves.

Think it's No Big Deal?

Of the 7.7 million healthcare workers in the U.S. it is estimated that 8-12% are latex sensitive. Persons with atopy have a 15% to 33% chance of developing sensitivity. Spina Bifida patients have a 60% chance of developing latex sensitivity.⁵



A person with latex sensitivity would not be allergic to latex house paint because it contains synthetic latex.