

**ROYAL BROMPTON HOSPITAL & HAREFIELD TRUST**  
**DEPARTMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE**

**Latex Allergy Information Sheet**

Latex is obtained from the tree *Hevea brasiliensis* and a wide variety of healthcare and household products are made with it. Those most at risk from latex allergy are health care workers, children with Spina Bifida and others who have regular contact with latex. Sometimes severe allergic reactions can occur and so it is important to know how to avoid contact with latex if you have this allergy.

**How can latex allergy affect me?**

For most people with latex allergy the symptoms are mild. They include an itchy rash, runny nose, sneezing and itchy watery eyes. More serious symptoms include wheezing, and in rare cases, a very serious reaction (anaphylactic shock) can occur which may be life-threatening. The symptoms of anaphylactic shock include wheezing, difficulty in breathing, feeling very faint, and swelling of the tongue or throat. The few patients who are at risk from anaphylactic shock will be given advice by their doctor, and emergency treatment to carry with them (an Epipen). If you have been given an Epipen, you need to regularly check its expiry date and make sure you know how to use it in an emergency.

The main problems for people with latex allergy occur when latex comes into contact with a mucosal surface *eg* the mouth, nose, genitals or inside the body during surgery. Other problems may occur with other kinds of contact *e.g.* with latex gloves, balloons, condoms, or when latex particles get into the air *e.g.* from powdered latex gloves or balloons.

If you have a latex allergy you may need to:

- be aware of the main dangers
- avoid all unnecessary contact with latex
- carry a medic alert bracelet or a latex allergy warning card ([www.medicalert.co.uk](http://www.medicalert.co.uk))
- seek urgent medical assistance if you are having a severe reaction

We are happy to advise you about which of these is necessary in your case.

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## What things contain latex?

Many consumer and healthcare products contain latex, sometimes in unlikely places. In general 'stretchy' rubber products such as gloves, balloons, condoms and elastic bands are more likely to be a problem, than 'hard' ones such as tyres, which contain very little latex protein. A full list of products containing latex is available from the Latex Allergy Support Group website ([www.lasg.co.uk](http://www.lasg.co.uk)). Lists of alternative non-latex products are also available.

Some people with latex allergy also react to certain fruits and vegetables such as bananas, kiwi, avocado, tomato and potato. This is because these foods and latex contain similar proteins which can cross-react.

Reactions may also be caused by any food which has been handled by people wearing latex gloves *eg* in restaurants and food packing facilities. These are probably very uncommon.

## Latex allergy in a healthcare setting

Many items in a hospital, clinic or dental surgery contain latex. Latex gloves are widely used as they give good protection against infection. All healthcare professionals should be aware of the risks of latex allergy and have policies in place to identify those at risk and to care for them safely.

- Insist that you are not examined by anyone wearing latex gloves – alternatives should always be available. If in any doubt, carry a pair of non-latex gloves with you.

You are at risk of a severe reaction in these settings if you are undergoing surgery, internal examination, catheterisation, certain X-Ray procedures, or injections. Many injection vials contain rubber bungs and these should not be used.

- Always make sure you have informed your GP, hospital doctor and dentist of your latex allergy so your care can be safely planned in advance to create a minimal latex environment.

If you need to go into hospital you should, ideally, be cared for in a single room so you aren't in contact with latex used on other patients. Any dental appointments should be carried out first thing in the morning so that levels of latex have not built up in the surgery.

Details of how hospitals should plan your care safely can be obtained from the Health & Safety Executive website [www.hse.gov.uk/latex/pdf/protocols.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/latex/pdf/protocols.pdf)

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## Support

The Latex Allergy Support Group is a very helpful organization which offers a wealth of up to date advice and support to those with latex allergy.

Latex Allergy Support Group  
PO Box 27  
Filey  
YO14 9YH

National helpline number 07071 225838 (open daily 7pm-10pm)  
Website [www.lasg.co.uk](http://www.lasg.co.uk)

Other useful websites are:

- <http://latexallergylinks.tripod.com/prot.html>
- [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/latexallergies.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/latexallergies.html)
- [www.latexallergyresources.org](http://www.latexallergyresources.org)
- [http://www.bad.org.uk/public/leaflets/bad\\_patient\\_information\\_gateway\\_leaflets/latex/index.asp](http://www.bad.org.uk/public/leaflets/bad_patient_information_gateway_leaflets/latex/index.asp)

If you need any further advice from us, please look at our website [www.lungsatwork.org.uk](http://www.lungsatwork.org.uk) or contact Julie Cannon, Clinical Nurse Specialist on 0207 351 8328 or [j.cannon@rbht.nhs.uk](mailto:j.cannon@rbht.nhs.uk)

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