

Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex

SOURCE: NIOSH/JCAHO/CDC

Latex allergy can result from repeated exposures to proteins in natural rubber latex through skin contact or inhalation. Reactions usually begin within minutes but can occur hours later and can produce various symptoms including skin rash and inflammation, respiratory irritation, asthma, and in rare cases, shock.

NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, recommends the following work practices to reduce exposure and risk:

- Use nonlatex gloves for activities not likely to involve contact with infectious materials – if you choose latex gloves use powder-free with reduced protein content to ensure an appropriate barrier protection
- Use nonlatex gloves if you have a known reaction; inform your supervisor
- When wearing latex gloves do NOT use oil-based hand creams or lotions unless they have been shown to reduce latex-related problems
- **Frequently clean work areas contaminated with latex dust**
- Learn to recognize the symptoms of latex allergy: skin rashes, hives, flushing, itching, nasal – eye or sinus symptoms, asthma, and shock
- **IF YOU DEVELOP SYMPTOMS – AVOID DIRECT CONTACT WITH LATEX gloves and products until you can see a physician experienced in treating latex allergy**

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 latex gloves worn by others
- Tell your employer, supervisor, physicians, nurses, and dentists that you have latex allergy
- Wear a medical alert bracelet
- Take advantage of latex allergy education and training provided by your employer and the client representative

GLOVES

- Gloves should be durable, fit properly, and not be so tight as to become easily ripped
- Damaged, ripped or torn gloves (or eye or face protection) must be replaced with appropriate personal protective equipment that is free from deficiency
- Contaminated gloves must not come in contact with equipment, items or surfaces that were not contaminated or infected. Gloves are inexpensive. Personnel should not feel as though gloves should be reused. Dispose of them whenever blood and body fluid is a potential or known concern.
- Gloves should be removed one at a time:
 - As you remove your hand from the glove, turn it inside out
 - Take the other hand out of the 2nd glove, turning it inside out and place it into the 1st glove for disposal

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE: CDC Hand Hygiene Guidelines