

# Latex allergy

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## Information for patients

This information sheet answers some of the questions you may have about latex allergy, how it can be treated and products that may put you at risk.

### What is latex allergy?

Allergens in natural rubber latex are proteins, which are derived from the rubber tree (*Hevea Brasiliensis*). They are present in both medical and consumer products such as latex gloves, balloons and condoms.

People most at risk of developing latex allergy are those who have regular contact with latex, generally through their occupations, for example healthcare workers and rubber industry workers.

Latex allergy can cause a variety of symptoms including immediate hypersensitivity (anaphylactic symptoms) and delayed hypersensitivity (contact dermatitis).

### Immediate hypersensitivity

This is an allergic response mediated by IgE (an antibody found in the blood). Hives or wheals appear on the skin that can spread beyond the point of contact with latex. Other immediate allergic symptoms include itchy eyes, swelling of the lips or tongue, breathlessness, dizziness, abdominal pain, low blood pressure and anaphylaxis.

### Delayed hypersensitivity

This occurs between 6 and 48 hours after contact with latex and causes the skin to become dry, crusty and leathery with eruptions appearing as sores and blisters.

This is not a life threatening reaction and is treated through the use of emollients and topical steroid creams. Where practical, steps can be taken to avoid contact with latex and therefore reduce the risk of a reaction.

### How is latex allergy diagnosed?

A blood test or skin prick test will show if you have IgE antibodies specific to latex, which may indicate immediate hypersensitivity. A patch test, which is carried out in the Dermatology department, is used to identify delayed hypersensitivity.

### How do I treat immediate latex allergy?

1. Avoidance is the best policy.
2. Always inform medical staff before undergoing any medical or surgical procedure or examination.
3. Wear a "medic alert" bracelet if you have a severe allergy.

4. If you have severe immediate hypersensitivity and have been given an anaphylaxis emergency kit, always carry it with you and ensure that you are comfortable with how to use it. Regularly check expiry dates.
5. If you need to wear gloves, make sure they are **non-latex** gloves. Vinyl is the most common alternative.
6. Research has shown that some people with a latex allergy also have a reaction to the following foods: banana, chestnuts, kiwi fruit and avocado.

**The food allergies are extremely rare but avoid these if eating them makes you feel ill.**

### **Useful numbers**

You can buy non-latex vinyl gloves (powdered and non-powdered) from:  
Shermond Surgical Supplies: 01273 588577

Allergy UK: [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org), 01322 619898

It is extremely important that you make sure your medical records at your GP (home doctor), dentist and any hospital clinics you attend have this on your notes:

“Allergic to latex — do not use latex rubber gloves, catheters or tubes”.

Please see below for a list of products to avoid and their safe alternatives.

### **Definite risk**

The risk will vary depending on the level of the patient's hypersensitivity. These products contain latex and have been associated with allergic reactions:

- Balloons
- Catheters
- Children's dummies or teats
- Condoms
- Elastic threads in clothing
- Hot water bottles
- Latex for modelling; dental impressions
- Latex rubber gloves for use at home
- Medical latex rubber gloves with powder
- Pencil erasers
- Red or black rubber tubing or sheet
- Rubber balls (squash balls)
- Rubber/elastic bands
- Shoes soles
- Some medicines for injection in multi-dose vials
- Tyres
- Unpowdered gloves

### **Possible risk**

Some people find the following products cause them problems.

- Latex adhesives for tiles, leather and cloth
- Latex coated adhesive tape
- Latex foam in furniture, pillows and mattresses

### **Safe alternatives**

Alternatives are available:

- Plastic alternatives

Durex Allergy (non-allergenic)  
Alginate or other modelling material  
Man-made rubber or plastic gloves  
Safe latex “free” surgical gloves  
Most adhesives are not made from latex  
Most adhesive tape is not made from latex

## **Allergy and Clinical Immunology Service contacts**

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## **Sharing your information**

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

## **Care provided by students**

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

## **PALS**

Appropriate PALS information depending on location/site will be placed in by the Publications Team.

Tel: **020 3299 3601**

Email: **kch-tr.PALS@nhs.net**

**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.**