



Appendix D Latex Glove Allergies

Summary: Learn about the three types of allergic latex reactions and how to respond to them.

Employees who often wear latex gloves are at risk for developing latex allergies. To avoid latex sensitivity, switch to nitrile-type surgical gloves. Advantages of nitrile gloves include:

- They're nonallergenic
- They're more durable than latex
- They offer more resistance to hazardous chemicals than latex
- They rip when punctured (an advantage over the pinhole leaks that can go unnoticed in latex gloves)

If latex gloves are necessary, use hypoallergenic, powder-free gloves.

Who is at risk? According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, between 5 percent and 15 percent of workers who use latex gloves will develop latex allergies. This includes health care workers (physicians, nurses, aides, dentists, dental hygienists, and housekeeping personnel), laboratory researchers, and technicians.

People who have a tendency toward allergic reactions are also at increased risk. Latex allergy is often associated with allergies to certain foods, especially avocados, potatoes, bananas, tomatoes, chestnuts, kiwi, and papaya.

There are three main types of latex reactions:

1. **Irritant contact dermatitis:** Even in those who don't have a true latex allergy, irritation from latex gloves can cause dry, itchy areas to develop on the skin, usually on the hands.
2. **Allergic contact dermatitis:** Also called "delayed sensitivity" or "chemical sensitivity dermatitis," this results from exposure to the chemicals added to latex. It causes a rash (similar to one caused by poison ivy) that begins one or two days after contact and may progress to oozing blisters or spread to other parts of the body.
3. **Latex allergy:** Also called "immediate sensitivity," this usually causes a reaction within minutes of latex exposure. The reaction could be mild (skin redness, hives, itching) or severe (respiratory symptoms or, rarely, shock). These reactions are similar to those caused by bee sting allergies.

Causes: The proteins that cause latex allergies are used to bind the powder used in some latex gloves. When powdered gloves are worn, more latex protein reaches the skin. Also, when gloves are changed, the protein particles get into the air, where they can be inhaled or come into contact with other parts of the skin.

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Powder-free gloves reduce exposure to latex protein (reducing the risk of latex allergy reaction), while hypoallergenic gloves reduce reactions to the chemical additives in latex (reducing the risk of allergic contact dermatitis).

How to respond to a latex reaction:

- **Learn to recognize the signs** of latex allergies: rashes, hives, itching, eye irritation, nasal or sinus irritation, asthma, coughing or shortness of breath, or (rarely) shock.
- **If you develop any of these symptoms**, stop using latex gloves and avoid latex-containing products. If possible, arrange to have latex gloves eliminated from your lab or workplace to avoid inhaling the powder from those worn by others.
- **See a physician** experienced in treating latex allergy.
- **Tell your supervisor and your health care providers** (including doctors, nurses, and dentists) that you have a latex allergy.
- **Wear a medical alert bracelet.**