

# NIOSH FAST FACTS

## Home Healthcare Workers

### How to Prevent Latex Allergies

Latex products are made from natural rubber, and sensitivity can develop after repeated exposure. Limiting exposure to latex can help prevent allergic reactions for both home healthcare workers and their clients.

#### LATEX EXPOSURE REACTIONS

Three types of reactions can occur when using latex products:

- **Irritant Contact Dermatitis**  
This is the most common negative reaction to latex. Symptoms include dry, itchy, irritated skin—most often on the hands.
- **Allergic Contact Dermatitis (delayed hypersensitivity)**  
This skin reaction looks like the rash from contact with poison ivy and usually shows up 24–96 hours after contact.
- **Latex Allergy (immediate hypersensitivity)**  
This type of reaction usually happens within minutes of exposure, but symptoms can also show up a few hours later. Symptoms of a mild reaction are skin redness, hives, or itching. Symptoms of more serious reactions might include runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, wheezing, coughing, or difficulty with breathing. Rarely, shock may occur, but a life-threatening reaction is seldom the first sign of sensitivity. A latex-exposed worker developing any serious allergic reactions should be taken to a doctor immediately.

#### EMPLOYERS SHOULD

- Provide workers with non-latex gloves when there is little contact with infectious material.
- Consider the use of vinyl, nitrile, or polymer gloves appropriate for infectious materials.
- Provide reduced-protein, powder-free gloves, if latex gloves are selected for use with infectious materials.
- Provide training to workers on latex allergy.
- Promptly arrange a medical evaluation for workers with symptoms of latex allergy. Provide these employees with non-latex gloves.

#### EMPLOYEES SHOULD

- Use non-latex gloves for activities not likely to involve contact with infectious materials.
- Request gloves that do not contain latex but still offer protection against infectious materials.



- Ask for reduced-protein, powder-free gloves, if your employer supplies latex gloves.
- Avoid oil-based creams or lotions when using latex gloves. They may cause the gloves to break down.
- Wash hands with a mild soap and dry hands completely after using gloves.
- Recognize symptoms of latex allergy (rash; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, and sinus irritation; asthma; and shock).
- Avoid direct contact with latex gloves and other latex-containing products if you develop symptoms of latex allergy, until you can see a doctor.

#### IF YOU ARE DIAGNOSED WITH LATEX ALLERGY

- Avoid touching, using, or being near latex-containing products.
- Avoid areas where latex is likely to be inhaled (for example, where powdered latex gloves are being used).
- Inform your employer and your personal healthcare professionals that you have latex allergy.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet.
- Follow your doctor's recommendations about latex allergy.
- Before receiving any shots (such as a flu shot), be sure the person giving it uses a latex-free vial stopper.
- Before undergoing a medical procedure or surgery, consult the specialist who will perform the procedure about any modifications that may be needed.

This is one in a series of six fast fact cards developed to provide practical advice for home healthcare workers and is based on NIOSH Hazard Review: Occupational Hazards in Home Healthcare, NIOSH Pub No. 2010-125.

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