

**HealthStream Course 14994
Providence Alaska Medical Center
Annual Safety Update 2011**

Latex Allergies



Learning Objectives

After completing this Latex Allergies lesson you will be able to:

- Describe what you need to do to reduce everyone's exposure to latex.
- Discuss steps to be taken when a patient is known to be allergic to latex.

Latex Allergies - Introduction

Latexes may be natural or synthetic. Natural latex is found in the milky sap of more than 12,000 plant species worldwide and is commonly called latex rubber. Both natural and synthetic latex is used to produce gloves, condoms, paint and clothing.

Since 2002, Providence Health Systems Alaska and Employee Health Services has been aggressively removing all latex products from all facilities in an effort to become a latex safe-environment.



Latex Facts

- Being exposed to latex when it's wet, like in dental procedures, increases potential reaction.
- 75% of persons with latex allergies are women.
- Poinsettias and ficus trees are in the same family as a rubber tree and their sap may produce a cross reaction to latex.
- Specific workers are at risk of developing latex allergy because they often use latex gloves. These include:
 - Housekeepers;
 - Hairdressers; and
 - People who work with or manufacture rubber products.



High Risk Categories

Person who have had:

- Multiple surgeries (especially if starting in infancy, i.e. spina bifida patients).
- Multiple allergies and asthma.
- Anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction) particularly during medical or dental procedures.
- Any reaction to latex products like balloons, condoms, and gloves.



Persons who are allergic to latex should not eat tropical fruits like bananas, kiwi, avocado, and chestnuts. They can produce a cross reaction.

Types of Latex Allergic Reactions

The two types of allergic reactions to latex are:

- **Type I - Immediate hypersensitivity which can be life threatening.**
- **Type IV - delayed hypersensitivity (non systemic) which is less severe and demonstrates more of a “sensitivity” to latex.**



Type I Allergic Reaction

A type I allergic reaction to latex affects less than 1% of the population. It is a true allergic reaction to the proteins in natural latex and can be life threatening. Symptoms include:

- **Immediate anaphylactic reaction**
- **Itching stinging and discomfort in the areas exposed to latex followed within 5-20 minutes by**
 - **swelling**
 - **redness**
 - **hives**
 - **generalized itching**
 - **wheezing, chest tightness**
 - **trouble breathing and**
 - **low blood pressure**



Type IV Allergic Reaction

A type IV allergic reaction to latex is characterized by:

- Delayed reaction
- Begins with redness and irritation of skin
- May continue with symptoms of contact dermatitis, itching, swelling, and rash
- Symptoms may spread beyond area of contact

How Do You Protect Yourself?

- Reduce your exposure to latex products.
- Wear synthetic gloves made of vinyl or nitrile whenever possible. PAMC does not permit the use of latex exam gloves.
- If you find the only gloves you have to use are latex, wear glove liners or find low protein or powder free type.
- If you must use latex gloves, remove them as soon as possible and wash hands immediately with a mild soap and dry thoroughly.



Patient with a Known Allergy to Latex

- The RN informs healthcare team of patient's latex allergy.
- If a patient has a history that indicates a possible latex allergy, a lab test may be ordered by their physician to confirm.
- Use standard latex precautions.
- Post a LATEX ALLERGY sign over patients bed and on door.
- Put an allergy band on patients wrist.
- Mark allergy on all patient charts, nursing notes, and care plan.
- Notify other departments involved in patient care of the allergy (i.e. radiology, oncology).

Symptoms - What To Do

If you develop symptoms of latex allergy:

- Avoid direct contact with latex gloves and other latex-containing products until you can see a physician experienced in treating latex allergy.
- Avoid areas where you might inhale the powder from latex gloves worn by other workers.
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If you think you might be having a latex allergic reaction seek medical attention right away!

If you have a known latex allergy:

- Consult your physician if you develop symptoms.
- Notify your employer and healthcare providers (physicians, nurses, dentists, etc.) that you have latex allergy.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet.
- call Employee Health if you have additional questions or concerns.



Latex Allergy Summary

- The potential for latex allergies can be reduced by avoiding latex products and by understanding what items might trigger a cross reaction.
- Special precautions are taken for patients with known latex allergies.

2011 Volunteer Annual Safety Update (ASU) Test Questions

Please open the 2011 Answer Sheet, print that document and mark your answers on the answer sheet.

Another option would be to open the 2011 Test Questions document, print it and mark your answers, then return either one to Volunteer Services.

Latex Allergies

43. Since 2002 Providence Health Systems Alaska and Employee Health Services has been aggressively removing all latex products from all facilities in an effort to become a latex safe environment.

True

False

44. There are two types of allergic reactions to latex.

True

False

45. You can protect yourself from latex allergies by:

A. Reducing your exposure to latex products

B. Use synthetic gloves made of vinyl or nitrile

C. Wash hands immediately after using latex gloves

D. All of the above