Avoiding Allergic Reactions to Latex Meeting Kit

SERIOUS HEALTH ISSUES FOR LATEX WORKERS

Most people who encounter latex products have no health problems, but some workers, continually exposed to latex gloves and other products containing natural rubber latex, develop allergic reactions. Those who work where latex products are manufactured or who have multiple allergic conditions may also be affected. A latex allergy can result in serious health problems.

NATURAL RUBBER LATEX: Natural rubber latex comes from the sap of the rubber tree, Hevea brasiliensis, found in Africa and Southeast Asia. Allergic reactions to products made with latex develop in persons who become allergic (or sensitized) to proteins contained in natural rubber latex. Natural rubber latex should not be confused with synthetic rubber made from chemicals. Synthetic rubber products, including “latex” house paints, are not made with natural latex and do not trigger allergic reactions in people who are allergic to products made with natural rubber latex.

PRODUCTS THAT CONTAIN NATURAL RUBBER LATEX: Latex is a common component of many medical and dental supplies. These include disposable gloves, dental dams, airway and intravenous tubing, syringes, stethoscopes, catheters, dressings and bandages. Latex also is found in many consumer products. These include condoms, handbags, balloons, athletic shoes, tires, tools, underwear leg and waistbands, rubber toys, baby bottles, nipples and pacifiers.

FOODS ARE POTENTIAL PROBLEMS FOR PEOPLE WITH LATEX ALLERGY: If you have latex allergy you also can have food allergies. The foods most likely to cause this problem include: apple, avocado, banana, carrot, celery, chestnut, kiwi, melons, papaya, raw potato and tomato.

LATEX ALLERGY SYMPTOMS

Latex allergy symptoms range from mild to severe. A reaction depends on how sensitive you are to latex and the amount of latex you touch or inhale.

Mild Symptoms

- Itching
- Skin redness
- Hives or rash

More Severe Symptoms

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Scratchy throat
- Wheezing
- Cough

LIFE-THREATENING SYMPTOMS: ANAPHYLAXIS: The most serious allergic reaction to latex is anaphylaxis, which can be deadly.

- Nausea and vomiting
- Drop in blood pressure
- Dizziness
- Loss of consciousness
- Rapid or weak pulse
- Confusion

ON THE JOB PROTECTION FROM LATEX. If you are latex allergic and your job involves frequent exposure to latex:

- Use latex free gloves.
- Request that non-powdered latex gloves be supplied to others in your area of work. This reduces airborne latex particle exposure and has been shown to dramatically reduce the risk of developing latex allergy in occupational settings.
- Look after your hands and have any irritation or rash evaluated by a doctor. An intact skin barrier reduces the

risk of developing latex allergy.

- It is important to note that avoiding any contact with latex is also an effective method of preventing latex allergy, particularly for non-medical use such as food handlers and hairdressers.

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TO AVOID LATEX

- Avoid latex in all its forms, and particularly avoid latex coming near your skin, face, eyes, nose or throat. Latex substitutes exist and can be used if required.
- Wear a medical identifications bracelet, stating you are allergic to latex. If you are unconscious or confused and need emergency treatment, then the nurses and doctors will be made aware of this.
- Carry your own supply of non-latex gloves (such as vinyl or synthetic rubber), in case of an emergency.
- Use vinyl or synthetic rubber gloves, if it is necessary to wear gloves.
- Consider avoiding occupations where latex is very difficult to avoid such as nursing, dentistry, medicine, veterinary science, hairdressing or food preparation.

FINAL WORD

Do not confuse synthetic rubber products and material rubber latex. The former is made from chemicals and the latter from the sap of a rubber tree – Hevea brasiliensis.