

LATEX SAFETY GUIDELINES

Latex-free living

Live in a world of pure & latex-free products.

There are approximately 40,000 various items that contain natural rubber latex (NRL) that are used by millions of Americans daily. Some everyday items include balloons, school supplies, gloves, postage stamps, hoses, tires, chewing gum, stickers, toys, and even the scratch-off portion of lottery tickets. While we cannot discount the effectiveness of latex rubber usage in our everyday lives, there's a good chance that it may not be completely suitable for everyone.

As 1 to 6% of the general population is sensitized to latex, it is important we are adequately informed about latex sensitivity. Natural rubber latex is a perplexing material. For one thing, it can be a fatal material for thousands of people. Then again, latex gloves remain the most cost-effective and safest contamination barrier. Latex can be a dangerous substance that must be used with caution.

Because latex sensitization must be everyone's concern, here are some pointers to reduce latex exposure to the barest minimum:

1. Latex-proof your home and office. Check contents and active ingredients in your household and office items.

Check to see if your household items latex content in rubber sink stoppers, sink and bath mats, rubber-grip utensils, electrical cords or water hoses.

Disposable diapers, feeding nipples, waterproof bed pads, adhesives such as glue, paste, and art supplies might also contain latex.

2. Look for rubber alternatives to latex rubber products.

If you're having a party, plan in advance to make sure latex isn't there. Use Mylar balloons instead of regular ones.

If you or your partner has a latex sensitivity, there are alternatives to latex condoms made from polyurethane and polyisoprene. The female condom is made from polyurethane and is safe for you to use.

3. Wear items that are free from harsh chemicals.

Make sure to check before buying any clothing article which could be made of rubber whether it contains latex rubber. This is especially important for products that will be in direct contact with your skin.

4. Choose shoes made of leather or man-made material.

If your family wears rubber-soled shoes, keep all your footwear in covered containers because some people with latex allergies might react to airborne latex particles from the shoes. Consider looking for shoes which do not contain latex rubber.

5. Before visiting doctors or dentists for any examination or procedure, warn them of your allergy to latex.

Alternatives to latex such as vinyl and nitrile gloves are available in the market. Nitrile gloves are made out of a synthetic rubber and they are puncture-resistant as well. They are considered "medical grade." Vinyl gloves, on the other hand, are a popular choice for the food industry and situations where high levels of durability and protection are less of a priority. Gloves made from these polymers do not contain any natural rubber latex, and therefore can be used by workers with latex allergy.

6. Allergy to latex may also mean allergy to cross-related fruits.

You should be aware that some latex allergic people also have certain food allergies. Foods most commonly associated with latex include bananas, avocados, kiwis, papaya, fig, potato, tomato, and chestnuts. If any of these foods give you symptoms such as itching around the mouth, local swelling, hives or shortness of breath, you should avoid them. Most people with latex allergy experience symptoms when they eat one or more of these foods.

For those who have extreme sensitivity to latex - for example, react even when briefly in contact with a glove or a balloon - be sure to take the following additional precautions:

Obtain and wear a Medic Alert bracelet printed with "severe allergy to natural rubber latex."

When traveling, always bring with you a variety of sizes of non-latex sterile gloves, in case you should need emergency medical or dental work.

Prior to surgery you should consult your physician about the need for a latex-free operating environment.

Be familiar with the proper use of the self-administration of epinephrine (adrenalin). The indications and proper use of this should be explained by your physician.

Keeping all these in mind, it is still best to consult your doctor before undertaking any medical or therapeutic course of action.