

# Latex allergy

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## What is latex?

Latex is the sap from the rubber tree, *hevea brasiliensis*. Latex, or natural rubber latex (NRL), is found in many every day products. Latex allergy is caused by proteins found in natural rubber latex.

## Latex gloves

Latex gloves are a frequent cause of latex allergy. Allergy to latex gloves usually causes a localized reaction (rather than an all-over reaction) such as on the hands or where the gloved hands touch the body, such as the face. Sometimes people can develop breathing problems as well.

Allergy to latex gloves is most common amongst healthcare workers. However, latex gloves are also commonly used by food handlers and hairdressers, despite more suitable varieties being available. If you are allergic to latex, be aware that some food handlers wear latex gloves for food preparation. This means there is the risk that proteins from the glove may be transferred to the food, therefore increasing the risk of an allergic reaction when the food is eaten.

## Latex products

In addition to latex gloves causing latex allergy, there are many other medical and household products that may contain latex. These may include:

Gloves	Condoms
Rubber bands	Some computer mouse pads
Balloons	Panty hose or elastic in underwear
Goggles	Rubber electrical cords on appliances
Rubber innersoles	Rubber boots or rain coats
Some medical products such as airway masks, catheters and dressings	Items with rubber handles such as tooth brushes, golf clubs, tennis racquets

## Risk factors for latex allergy

- A history of asthma, eczema or hay fever (called atopy)
- Damaged skin i.e. dry and cracked skin
- Working in the healthcare industry and frequent wearing of latex gloves
- Using powdered latex gloves. Powder facilitates the transfer of the latex allergen to the skin
- Long term exposure to latex, especially individuals who have undergone surgery several times

Some people with latex allergy can also be allergic to some fruits, as some foods have similar protein contents to latex. These include:

- Banana
- Avocado
- Kiwi fruit
- Melons

### Signs and symptoms of latex allergy:

- An itchy, red rash *within minutes* of contacting latex
- Itchy, red skin and/or eyes
- Runny nose, sneezing and sometimes asthma
- Burning, stinging, itching, tingling and swelling from latex contact on 'mucous membranes' lining internal surfaces, like the mouth (from blowing up balloons or gloves worn by dentists), or the vagina (from condoms)

Fortunately very few people have a severe reaction to latex, which is called anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis causes swelling, difficulty breathing, collapse and occasionally even death. An 'Epipen' which is a special injectable adrenaline syringe, is used in an emergency to treat anaphylaxis.

For more information on anaphylaxis visit the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy website [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

### Management of latex allergy:

Unfortunately there is no cure for latex allergy, so it is important to avoid contact with latex products at work and home.

If you are not sure whether a product contains latex, it is best to contact the product manufacturer.

People with latex allergy need to wear a Medic Alert bracelet, as all healthcare facilities use latex products, and you may not be able to tell them that you are allergic to latex.

Remember to tell your dentist also, as dentists commonly wear latex gloves.

**Remember... if you are a healthcare worker, and are allergic to latex, there are other suitable glove varieties available, such as nitrile and neoprene. Vinyl gloves are not suitable as they do not protect against bodily fluids.**

### Further information

- [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)
- [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- [www.cdc.gov/niosh/latexalt.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/latexalt.html)
- [www.dermnetnz.org/dermatitis/latex-allergy.html](http://www.dermnetnz.org/dermatitis/latex-allergy.html)
- [www.latexallergyresources.org](http://www.latexallergyresources.org)
- [latexallergylinks.tripod.com](http://latexallergylinks.tripod.com)
- [www.osha.gov/SLTC/latexallergy](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/latexallergy)

More information available at [www.occderm.asn.au](http://www.occderm.asn.au) [www.rashprevention.com.au](http://www.rashprevention.com.au) [www.skincancer.asn.au](http://www.skincancer.asn.au)  
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