Latex Allergy

Overview Of Topic

Latex is made from a milky fluid derived from the rubber tree. Latex allergy can result from repeated exposures to proteins in natural rubber latex through skin contact or inhalation.

Workers with ongoing latex exposure from wearing latex gloves or using latex-containing medical supplies are at risk for developing latex allergy. Such workers include healthcare workers, as well as laboratory technicians, food service workers, housekeeping personnel, gardeners, and anyone else routinely using latex gloves.

Health Hazards

The amount of latex exposure needed to produce an allergic reaction is unknown, but increasing the exposure to latex increases the risk. In sensitized persons, symptoms usually begin within minutes of exposure; but they can occur hours later and can be quite varied.

Three types of reactions can occur in persons using natural latex products:

- Irritant contact dermatitis.
- Allergic contact dermatitis (delayed hypersensitivity).
- Latex allergy.

Irritant contact dermatitis

The most common reaction to latex products is irritant contact dermatitis — the development of dry, itchy, irritated areas. This reaction is caused by skin irritation from using gloves and can also result from repeated hand washing and drying, incomplete hand drying, use of cleaners and sanitizers, and exposure to powders added to the gloves. Irritant contact dermatitis is not a true allergy.

Chemical sensitivity dermatitis

Allergic contact dermatitis (sometimes called chemical sensitivity dermatitis) results from exposure to chemicals added to natural latex during harvesting, processing, or manufacturing. These chemicals can cause skin reactions similar to those caused by poison ivy in the area of skin touched by the latex.

Latex allergy

Latex allergy can be a more serious reaction to latex, usually beginning within minutes of exposure to latex, but they can occur hours later and can produce various symptoms.

Mild reactions to latex involve skin redness, rash, hives, or itching. More severe reactions may involve respiratory symptoms such as runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, and difficult breathing, coughing spells, and wheezing. Rarely, shock may occur; however, a life-threatening reaction is seldom the first sign of latex allergy.

Training Tips

Review the employee handout. List work areas or tasks that require the use of latex products. Review the symptoms of latex allergy.

While OSHA does not have training requirements specifically for latex gloves, OSHA does require training on all PPE provided by the employer.

To help reduce latex exposure:

- use non-latex gloves for activities that are not likely to involve contact with infectious materials.
- use reduced-protein gloves or powder-free gloves to prevent the development of allergies in employees.
- tell employees not use oil-based hand creams or lotions in conjunction with latex gloves, as these may cause latex to deteriorate.
- train employees to wash hands with mild soaps and to dry hands thoroughly after removing gloves.

Review with employees the reporting procedures they should follow if they think they are developing latex allergy.

Where To Go For More Information

OSHA Technical Information Bulletin, April 12, 1999.

NIOSH Publication No. 97-135, June 1997.

29 CFR 1910.1030(d)(3)(iii)—Bloodborne pathogens.

KELLER'S 5-MINUTE SAFETY TALKS

Latex Allergy

Overview

The use of natural rubber latex gloves has increased dramatically in all industries.

Latex allergies can result from repeated exposures to proteins in natural rubber latex through skin contact or inhalation. The amount of exposure needed to sensitize individuals to natural rubber is not known.

Latex allergy is a reaction to certain proteins in the rubber or the processing compounds found in the rubber. In some people the allergic reaction begins immediately while in others it may take hours to develop.

How can it hurt me?

Latex can cause both irritant and allergic reactions. Irritant contact dermatitis is not an allergic reaction, but the dried, cracked skin it causes can lead to allergic reactions.

Mild reactions can include skin redness, rash, hives, or itching.

More severe reactions may involve runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, and asthma. In rare cases shock may occur; however, life-threatening reaction is seldom the first sign of latex allergy.

What must I do?

Most allergy sufferers experience a progression from skin irritation to respiratory symptoms over a period of months or years. Once an allergy to latex develops, individuals continue to have symptoms even from incidental exposures.

To protect yourself from developing latex allergy, learn to recognize the symptoms. If you think you are developing allergic reactions to latex, inform your supervisor, and consult a healthcare professional.

You may also:

- use non-latex gloves, reduced-protein gloves, or powder-free gloves to help prevent the development of allergies.
- avoid using oil-based hand creams or lotions, which may cause gloves to deteriorate.
- wash hands with a mild soap and dry hands thoroughly after removing gloves.

What must my employer do?

Employers should also have procedures in place for reporting suspected instances of latex allergies, and provide training for all affected employees.

Latex Allergy
Sign-Off Sheet

This sign-off sheet documents the employees at this company, _____, who have taken part in a training session on Latex Allergy. The session covered:

- Operations at this facility which expose employees to latex gloves.
- Symptoms of latex allergy.
- The procedures for reporting latex allergies or other health concerns to your employer.

The space below is for employees to "sign off" that they were in attendance.

Date of Training: _____ **Facility:** _____

Employee Signature	**Print Name Here**
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
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_____	_____
	_____
	Supervisor's Signature