

PROCEDURES FOR REDUCING LATEX IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

PURPOSE: Exposure to latex allergens in the school environment will be minimized and controlled by latex product awareness and a decrease in the volume/usage of latex products on the premises.

DEFINITION OF LATEX ALLERGY: Latex allergy is defined as an allergy to the proteins retained in finished natural rubber latex products. It is an acquired allergy whose symptoms may become more severe with repeated exposure. Controlling exposure is the key.

GENERAL INFORMATION: There are three categories of reactions:

- Irritant contact dermatitis: this may be due to latex or other causes such as frequent glove usage, cleansers, wet hands, lotions and powders. Itchy rash, hives or eczema on skin under the gloves.
- Allergic contact dermatitis: also known as a Type IV allergy. Symptoms include, but are not excluded to: redness, itching, hives, ulcers and blistering of skin. It may occur several hours after exposure or as much as 36-48 hours later. This can progress to respiratory symptoms.
- Immediate allergic reaction: This is also known as a Type I allergy. Symptoms may (localized and generalized) develop in as little as 10 minutes or as late as 96 hours later and include, but are not limited to immediate reactions or may occur within a few minutes after exposure. Redness, hives, swelling, itching, watery, swollen eyes, nausea/diarrhea rapid heart rate, hypotension, respiratory arrest, and anaphylactic shock as potential symptoms.

METHODS OF EXPOSURE:

- Direct contact with latex
- Indirect contact (particles left on surfaces, clothing, etc.)
- Inhalation of airborne latex proteins (glove powder, balloons, etc)

HIGH-RISK GROUPS:

While it is estimated that the general population has a 1-6% sensitization rate, there are several groups at greater risk.

- Rubber industry workers
- Children with spina bifida and others who have undergone multiple medical procedures (where latex products are commonly used) 10-65%
- Health care workers 8-17%
- Those with any occupational exposure to latex products (hair dressers, food handlers, housekeepers, day care providers and any occupation that requires frequent use of gloves)

LATEX AND FOOD ALLERGY CONNECTION:

People with latex allergy may also experience an allergic reaction to some foods that contain the same allergic proteins as those found in latex. This reaction, called cross-reactivity, can be triggered by:

- Bananas
- Chestnuts
- Passion fruit
- Avocado
- Kiwi
- Celery
- Melon

INTERVENTIONS:

1. A list of latex-free alternative products, supplies and equipment will be available as a resource to the schools.
2. Avoidance of latex products will be the responsibility of those individuals allergic to latex. Faculty and other staff aware of the latex allergy and potential latex product exposure will collaborate with the allergic individual (and family as appropriate) to assist him/her to minimize exposure.
3. When ordering new products, a latex-free product will be obtained when at all possible.** If a latex-free substitute is not available, the allergic individual will practice avoidance procedures.
4. Appropriate staff will be informed of any student allergic to latex and advised of any necessary accommodations.
5. Written documentation of latex/latex-free product content, and /or clear labeling of the product packaging, should be available to verify product content before use with an allergic individual.
6. Latex balloons are prohibited from inside the school and outside on school grounds. Non-latex or Mylar balloons may be substituted.
7. Food handlers in the cafeteria, custodians on the building premises, school nurse, health aide, faculty and students will use non-latex gloves.
8. Tennis Balls will not be cut open and used as chair leg coverings as when used in this manner they may emit latex into the air.

REFERENCES:

Children's Hospital Boston-Latex Balloon Safety Policy

The American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
<http://allergy.mcg.edu>

American Latex Allergy Association
www.latexallergyresources.org

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
www.aaaai.org

National Association of School Nurses
www.nasn.org

SchoolNurse.com

www.schoolnurse.com

**To purchase non-latex products, it must be financially reasonable. Some non-latex supplies/equipment are more costly than latex versions of the same product.

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