

## Easy precautions to remember

1. Avoid contact with products containing natural rubber latex, even if you don't have an allergy to it. The three main products which cause problems are latex gloves, latex balloons and latex condoms. Some feeding equipment also contains natural rubber latex.
2. Let your doctor, surgeon and dentist know about your allergy before your appointment.
3. Check your home, place of work or school and advise them of equipment or products containing natural rubber latex and possible substitutes.
4. Consult your doctor about medicine you can take to reduce allergy symptoms.
5. If you are at risk of anaphylaxis wear a Medic Alert bracelet.
6. Avoid eating kiwi fruit, bananas and avocados if you have a cross reaction to foods.
7. Avoid takeaway food which is prepared or served by people wearing latex gloves.

For further information on natural rubber latex allergy please contact your local doctor or SBH Queensland.

### The website

[www.sswahs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/allergy/resources/allergy/latexallergy.pdf](http://www.sswahs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/allergy/resources/allergy/latexallergy.pdf)  
is also a very good source of information.



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# Latex Allergy and Spina Bifida



## What is natural rubber latex allergy?

Natural rubber latex is the rubber that has been made from the sap of the rubber tree — *Hevea Brasiliensis*. Its chemical name is isoprene but because it is a plant product it also contains a number of proteins.

Researchers believe it is two of these proteins, not the latex itself, which give rise to natural rubber latex allergy. Allergic reactions most often occur after exposure to products like latex gloves, balloons and condoms which are made using a dipping process., but can occur after contact with any item made with natural rubber latex.

## People with spina bifida are often affected

Research shows that as many as 40% of people with spina bifida are affected. It is believed that this high rate is due to frequent extensive exposure to natural rubber latex products such as surgical gloves used in multiple surgeries and other procedures early in children's lives. Recent research has shown that if children with spina bifida avoid contact with natural rubber latex, the risk of acquiring an allergy to it is reduced 6 fold.

## What are the symptoms?

The first symptoms of natural rubber latex allergy are quite often a rash, swelling and itch at the point of contact. The symptoms may also include hay fever type symptoms such as itchy and swollen eyes, runny nose and sneezing. Some people may also develop asthma like symptoms such as chest tightness, wheezing, coughing and shortness of breath, especially if the latex

allergens are inhaled.

Allergens can transfer from latex gloves to the cornstarch powder which they are often coated with and then become airborne and be inhaled. The most severe reactions occur when the allergens make direct contact with moist surfaces, such as mouth, nose, throat, vagina, rectum or internal tissues during surgery.

## Anaphylaxis

Although it is uncommon, some people with a natural rubber latex allergy can have a potentially life threatening reaction called anaphylaxis or anaphylactic shock. The symptoms of anaphylaxis are difficulty breathing, severe rashes, nausea, a drop in blood pressure and loss of consciousness. It occurs within minutes of exposure and requires an injection of epinephrine (adrenaline). People at risk of anaphylaxis will be given an epipen by their doctor who will show them and their parents how to use it.

It is important to remember that anaphylaxis as a result of natural rubber latex allergy is rare and nobody will go into anaphylactic shock without already having a significant history of allergic reactions.

## How does an allergy to natural rubber latex develop ?

The prevalence of natural rubber latex allergy is directly related to the number of surgeries each person has. The more often people are exposed to natural rubber latex the more they are likely to develop and increase sensitisation.

If you suspect that you have an allergy to natural rubber latex or are becoming sensitised to it you should see an allergist. The allergist will usually perform a skin prick test to ascertain whether you do have an allergy.

## Is there any treatment?

There is no treatment but medications are available to alleviate the symptoms. The best treatment is to avoid exposure to natural rubber latex altogether. Taking a daily antihistamine such as Zirtek or Telfast may also help.

## Is all rubber a problem?

Rubber products can be made from natural rubber latex, synthetic latex or other types of rubber. It is only the products made from natural rubber latex which are of concern. As they cannot be visually distinguished from products which contain other types of rubber, it is necessary to check labels or ask manufacturers to find out if a product contains natural rubber latex.

Products made from crepe rubber, such as shoe soles, and synthetic latex, such as latex paints, are unlikely to cause an allergic reaction. Even products made from natural rubber latex but hardened during processing, such as wheelchair tyres, cause few problems.

## Latex allergy and food sensitivity

People with natural rubber latex allergy can have a cross reaction to a number of fruits, especially kiwi fruit, banana and avocado because of a similarity between the proteins in latex and these fruits. It is not necessary to avoid these fruits unless they are causing a problem. The reaction to them seems to follow the allergy to natural rubber latex so there is no need to avoid them if you are not allergic to natural rubber latex.

Recent research has also discovered that some people with a natural rubber latex allergy have a cross reaction to the sap of the poinsettia plant. It is advisable to avoid touching this plant if you have an allergy to natural rubber latex.