

Spina Bifida & Latex Allergies



SPINA BIFIDA & LATEX ALLERGIES

Latex is the sap from the *Hevea brasiliensis* tree. The first reports of latex allergies in people with Spina Bifida were in the late 1980s. Today, experts think latex allergies could be common for up to 73 percent of those with Spina Bifida.

No one knows why people are allergic to latex. Some experts think it's because people have too much contact with it. People with Spina Bifida that have or have had shunts, other allergies and a lot of surgeries may be at more risk than others. Latex allergies are not specific to Spina Bifida and can be a problem for anyone else who has a lot of contact with it.

Latex allergy is not fully understood. Experts are still learning what proteins cause it.

Latex reaction

Check labels to ensure they do not have natural latex rubber in them.

Signs of an allergic reaction include:

- watery and itchy eyes;
- sneezing and coughing;
- rash or hives;
- swelling of the windpipe;
- wheezing;
- a hard time breathing;
- life-threatening collapse of blood circulation

The only way to not have a latex reaction is to avoid things with latex or latex-contaminated powder. Contact occurs when latex touches the skin, mouth, eyes, genital areas or bladder. Severe reactions can take place if latex enters the bloodstream. Powder from latex balloons or gloves can get into the air. This is a problem when breathed or touched by a person who is allergic. Food touched by people wearing latex gloves might have this powder on it. (People allergic to latex may also be allergic to some fruits and vegetables.)

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Steps to take

Avoid latex products right from birth. Things made of silicone, plastic, nitrile or vinyl can be used instead.

Those who had a reaction to latex should:

- wear a medic-alert bracelet or necklace;
- carry auto-injectable epinephrine;
- carry sterile non-latex gloves and other non-latex medical items for emergencies.

Discuss latex allergy and avoidance with health care providers, schools, pre-schools, visitors and anyone else who is involved with the person who is allergic. Talk to health care providers before hospitalisation or surgery to prevent accidents and for latex-safe care.

Products containing Latex

The following items may be risky for people with a latex allergy:

- Health care items with latex: gloves, catheters, tourniquets, elastic/ace bandages, IV tubing injection ports, vial stoppers, adhesive tape, dental dams and Band-aids.
- Other items with latex: balloons, pacifiers, rubber bands, stretchy clothes, beach toys, Koosh balls, bottle nipples, condoms, diaphragms, diapers and art supplies.

Common household and hospital products containing latex:

Household gloves	Hospital gloves
Condoms	Condom incontinence aids
Wheelchair tyres	Adhesive tapes (sticky plasters)
Some urinary catheters	Some enema tubing
Protective sheets	Colostomy/urostomy products
Balloons and rubber balls	Art supplies
Dental dams	Baby bottle nipples and pacifiers
Elastic on clothes	Beach toys
Chewing gum	

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Foods with a cross-reactivity to latex

Research has shown that proteins found in certain foods show similar immune system reactivity to the proteins found in latex. So, if your mouth itches when you eat any of the foods listed below, you could be allergic to latex as well. Foods which have been identified as having cross reactivity include:

- Bananas
- Potatoes
- Avocados
- Tomatoes
- Kiwi Fruit
- Mangoes
- Chestnuts

There is a list available from the Spina Bifida Association (USA) This list provides a guide to some of the most common objects containing latex and offers some alternatives. It is not meant to be a comprehensive listing.

Is there a treatment?

Unfortunately, as with most allergies, the only effective treatment is avoidance. Substitute products made with other materials (for example vinyl or nitrile gloves can be used instead of latex gloves) or cover the items with a cloth to avoid direct contact. Consult an allergist, wear a medic alert bracelet and tell all your care providers about your allergy.