American Latex Allergy Association

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The ABCs Of Latex Allergy At School

This time of year brings cool crisp days, cozy evenings inside, and that event dreaded by children everywhere?the return to school. However, for children with an allergy to natural rubber latex (NRL), school represents more than just homework. School can be a dangerous place if these children are exposed to NRL. NRL is present in many common items used in the school setting, including NRL gloves used by janitorial and kitchen workers, erasers, rubber bands, balloons, playground balls, and carpeting. Children with an NRL allergy can have serious reactions if exposed to these everyday items, ranging from mild skin reactions to asthma attacks to full-blown anaphylaxis. Avoidance is crucial in order for NRL-allergic students to have a normal and healthy school experience. The following ABCs will assist in keeping your students safe.

A: Approach Administration

The first step is approaching school administration, developing school policies, and educating school staff. Many schools are not aware of the implications of NRL allergy, and some staff may find this information overwhelming and even unbelievable. In addition to general school policies, each NRL-allergic student should have a personal medical and accommodation plan. This plan should be developed by all involved, including administrators, the school nurse, the student, the teachers, the allergist, and the parents.

B: Begin Identifying Trouble Spots

The second step is to identify areas of potential NRL exposure. This includes within the classroom, the cafeteria, the gym and playground, the school nurse?s office, and even school buses. Cafeteria workers must be aware of cross-sensitization between NRL and foods such as bananas, kiwi, and avocado.

The gloves used by housekeeping and food service personnel should be closely examined. Some schools may not be ready to switch completely to powder-free, nonlatex gloves. However, a compromise should at least be made by using low-protein, nonpowdered NRL gloves to reduce NRL exposure. Non-latex gloves must be used, however, in any area frequented by students with a known NRL allergy.

In addition, many schools are banning latex balloons because of the NRL danger they present, as well as because they can create a choking hazard.

C: Create Emergency Protocols

Finally, emergency protocols should be created and staff educated about them in the event of an anaphylactic reaction. This could be a life-threatening event, and staff should be comfortable in dealing with it while waiting for rescue crews to arrive. Latex-free medical equipment must be readily available as well.

In conclusion, children with an NRL allergy may be misunderstood by their classmates. Adults in the school environment should act as advocates for these children so their school experience is as normal and healthy as possible.

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