

LATEX ALLERGY...Hidden Dangers....Restaurants/Grocers/Food Service

FACT SHEET

Inadvertent exposure to latex poses a serious health risk to millions of Americans.

It is estimated that 1-6% of the general population; 17-22% of healthcare workers; 68% of individuals with spina bifida have a natural rubber latex allergy. Allergic reactions to Natural Rubber Latex can range from a rash to life-threatening anaphylaxis.

Latex proteins (allergens) can be transferred from natural rubber latex products like latex gloves and latex balloons. The latex proteins bind with the powder on these products and can inadvertently be added to the food being prepared or can become aerosolized creating an unsafe environment.

There are many reports of incidences of latex reactions in restaurants, grocers and food services. The reactions have ranged from mild to severe.

Many States have banned latex glove use in food service. Rhode Island, Oregon, Arizona, Massachusetts and Wisconsin have laws or food codes banning latex glove use in food service.

The key to preventing an allergic latex reaction is avoidance. In the event of an allergic reaction be prepared.

Why you may be at risk for a latex allergic reaction...

Latex Gloves used in Food Preparation or Cleaning - The use of latex gloves provides a potential route for inadvertent exposure to latex proteins. The transfer of these latex proteins from the latex gloves bind to the powder and is then transferred on to food being prepared or surfaces, and also can become air borne.

Latex Balloons – Latex balloons are a significant source of latex proteins. These proteins bind with the powder on a balloon as they are blown up and is aerosolized creating an unsafe environment.

Cross Reactive Foods - There are many fruits and vegetables that share some of the major allergens with latex. Some patrons with latex allergy could be allergic to these. The list of cross reactive foods is on our website www.latexallergyresources.org/cross-reactive-food

Patrons: What to do... Develop a Latex Allergy Action Plan...

Communication - Call ahead. Ask if Latex Gloves are used, if they allow Latex Balloons and ask if the restaurant has a Latex and an Anaphylaxis policy.

Clarify and Verify - with the server and/or manager. Recheck prior to ordering.

Awareness - Be aware of your environment and know the symptoms of latex allergy. Be prepared in the event of a latex reaction.

It's an ALLERGY, Not a Preference!!!!

Employees - Dangers

- You can develop a Latex Allergy by repeated exposure and reactions to latex allergens.
- Wearing Latex Gloves-the use and changing daily of multiple latex gloves.
- Inhaling airborne latex particles-some natural rubber latex products (gloves, balloons) have powder and this powder binds with the latex proteins and is like dust it is everywhere.
- Latex Balloons latex balloons are a significant source of latex proteins. These proteins bind with the powder on a balloon as they are blown up and is aerosolized creating an unsafe environment.

Employees - Prevention

- Think of Natural Rubber Latex proteins as a food and air contaminant.
- Request latex alternative gloves such as vinyl, nitrile and polyvinylchloride.
- Use good personal hygiene. The wearing of gloves is NOT a substitute for frequent and thorough hand washing. Follow the hand washing guidelines.
- Know the signs and symptoms of Latex Allergy (common signs: rash; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, and sinus irritation; asthma; and anaphylaxis).
- Seek medical attention if symptoms develop.

EMPLOYERS - What to do to provide a latex safe environment for your employees and patrons

- The keys are education and awareness and in order to make an impact preventive measures need to be implemented. The following documents provide safety and health information regarding latex allergy and prevention.

*NIOSH Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex in the workplace
OSHA Technical Bulletin: Potential for Allergy to Natural Rubber Latex gloves and products
Home Healthcare Workers: How to Prevent Latex Allergies (NIOSH) Publication 2012-119.
Latex Allergy, A Prevention Guide (NIOSH) Publication 98-113.*

- Protect your patrons and your employees from latex reactions.
- Provide latex alternative gloves such as vinyl, nitrile and polyvinylchloride.
- Ban latex balloons from the facility.
- Implement hand washing policy - The use of gloves does not replace hand washing.
- Develop a latex allergy and anaphylaxis policy.
- Provide employee training.
- Know the signs of latex allergy (common signs: rash; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, and sinus irritation; asthma; and anaphylaxis).
- Know the signs and how to treat anaphylaxis (common signs: hives, itching, swelling of the lips, tongue, mouth or throat, difficulty breathing, low blood pressure and dizziness).
- Know how to use an epinephrine auto injector.
- Seek medical attention for employees that develop latex allergy symptoms.

The Federal Americans with Disabilities Act provides protection for individuals with latex allergy and employee protection.

For more information on Latex Allergy and Restaurants see: <http://latexallergyresources.org/articles-and-brochures>