

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

FACT SHEET

Each year inadvertent exposure to latex poses a serious health risk to more than one million Americans in restaurants, grocery stores and food service establishments.

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

Latex proteins (allergens) can be transferred from products like latex gloves and latex balloons. When the proteins bind with the powder on these products it easily gets into food or is released into the air creating an unsafe environment. In fact many states have banned latex glove use in food service—Rhode Island, Oregon, Arizona, Massachusetts and Wisconsin.

The key to preventing a latex allergy reaction is **avoidance**. When accidental exposure occurs and an anaphylactic reaction ensues, it is important to:

- Recognize the symptoms (rash; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, and sinus irritation; asthma; and anaphylaxis)
- Administer an epinephrine auto injector immediately. It is the **only** medication known to stop the progression of anaphylaxis.
- Call 911 and seek emergency medical treatment.
- Keep two epinephrine auto-injectors on hand, in case symptoms recur before emergency medical assistance is available. Up to 35% of people will require more than one dose.

Potential sources of 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. Proteins from the latex gloves bind to the powder and is then transferred to food being prepared or surfaces or it can also become airborne.

Latex Balloons – Latex balloons are a significant source of latex proteins. The proteins bind with the powder on a balloon as they are blown up and are released in the air where they can easily be inhaled.

Cross-reactive Foods - Many fruits and vegetables 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, do they allow latex balloons and does the restaurant have a latex or 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 anaphylaxis. Be prepared to administer epinephrine and call 911.

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

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American Latex Allergy Association

www.latexallergyresources.org

Support for development of these Fact Sheets
was provided by Mylan Specialty L.P.

Employees - Dangers

- Latex allergy can develop by repeated exposures to latex allergens.
- Daily use and frequent changing of latex gloves heightens risk.
- Inhaling the powder from natural rubber latex products such as gloves or balloons can cause a reaction.

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 handwashing. Follow proper handwashing guidelines.
- Know the signs and symptoms of latex allergy (common signs: itching, hives, redness, swelling, flushing, hoarseness, difficulty swallowing, shortness of breath, wheezing, chest pain or tightness, vomiting, diarrhea, cramps, itchy/red/watery eyes, or nasal congestion).
- Administer epinephrine auto-injector at the first signs of anaphylaxis. Epinephrine is the **only** treatment designed to stop the progression of anaphylaxis.
- Call 911 and seek medical care for observation and follow-up treatment.

EMPLOYERS - Provide a safe environment for your employees and patrons

- Awareness and education are essential. 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 handwashing policy. The use of gloves does not replace proper handwashing.
- Develop a latex allergy and anaphylaxis policy.
- Provide employee training.
- Seek support for employees who develop latex allergy symptoms.
- Know the signs of latex allergy (rash; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, and sinus irritation; asthma; and anaphylaxis).
- Know how to treat anaphylaxis
 - Administer your epinephrine auto-injector immediately
 - Call 911
 - Follow up with a board-certified allergist for accurate diagnosis and prevention/treatment plan

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



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