

# Latex Allergy

## Who's at risk and how to lower risk of a reaction

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This handout explains latex allergy symptoms, what triggers them, who's at risk, how to lower risk of an allergic reaction and what to do if a reaction happens.

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### What is latex?

Latex is made from tree sap and is used to make rubber products. Latex is found in items in hospitals (more rarely today), the community and at home. It is in some clothing, toys, gloves, balloons, condoms, rubber tires and many other items. Look for other materials like plastic, vinyl or silicone to replace latex items. These do not cause latex allergies.

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### What is latex allergy?

Latex contains proteins that cause allergies in some people. Signs of an allergic reaction to latex are:

- Whole body reaction leading to shock (anaphylaxis: an-eh-fil-AK-siss): Watery eyes, breathing problems (wheezing)
- Skin: Swelling, redness, itching, hives or rash

These responses occur when latex items touch the skin, the mucous membranes (like inside the nose, mouth, bladder, vagina or rectum) or are breathed into the lungs like when a rubber balloon pops.

For some people, the symptoms can get worse the more contact they have with latex.

It is rare, but in some cases, a life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis may happen. This is when the mucous membranes swell and breathing may be cut off. It's important to have an EpiPen or alternative ready and call your doctor or 911 if this happens.

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### Who is at risk for developing a latex allergy?

Anyone can develop a latex allergy, but certain groups are at greater risk of becoming allergic. High-risk groups include children who have:

- Had many exposures to latex products.
  - Had 3 or more surgeries in their stomach area
  - Issues with peeing (urologic) or genitals, especially with a catheter
  - A defect of the brain and spine (spina bifida)
  - Severe food allergies to bananas, avocados, other fruits and water chestnuts
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#### To Learn More

- Neurodevelopmental Clinic  
206-987-2210
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

#### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

### How can I lower my child's risk for latex allergy?

If your child is in one of the high-risk groups but has not yet had an allergic response, there are some things that you can do:

- Try to limit your child's contact with latex and rubber products, which can include rubber bands, balloons, buttons on electronic devices, underwear elastic, etc.
- Avoid letting latex touch your child's mucous membranes (like inside the nose, mouth, bladder, vagina or rectum).
- Use products made of non-latex materials (plastic, vinyl, silicone or Mylar).
- Tell your child's school and daycare, so rubber items like toys and balloons can be avoided and cleaning and food prep staff don't wear latex gloves.
- Have all healthcare providers, including dentists, use the non-latex versions of items like gloves and catheters. While latex has been mostly removed from hospital and clinic environments, it is still good to be cautious.

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### What do I do if my child has an allergy to latex?

Do **all of the above** and:

- Avoid all latex products.
- Have your child wear a MedicAlert bracelet or necklace.
- Carry a letter from your child's doctor describing their allergy.
- Ask your child's doctor if you should carry an EpiPen (epinephrine injector kit to treat anaphylaxis) with you. These kits give you the supplies to inject epinephrine into your child to stop the allergic reaction. You can find cheaper alternatives under the names: Adrenaclick, Auvi-Q, Symjepi or by looking for coupons on GoodRx.com.
- If your child is scheduled for a procedure or surgery, tell the healthcare providers about the latex allergy. Special medicines may be given before the surgery to prevent a reaction. Ask for the first appointment of the day.
- Carry non-latex gloves for times when only the latex type is available.
- If your child is having any signs of latex allergy, contact your doctor right away or call 911 if needed. Administer the EpiPen or alternative as directed by your doctor.

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### Additional Resources

- Latex Allergy: Tips to Remember - American Academy of Allergy and Immunology  
[aaaai.org/conditions-and-treatments/library/allergy-library/latex-allergy.aspx](http://aaaai.org/conditions-and-treatments/library/allergy-library/latex-allergy.aspx)
- Natural Rubber Latex Allergy in Spina Bifida - Spina Bifida Association  
[spinabifidaassociation.org/resource/latex-2/](http://spinabifidaassociation.org/resource/latex-2/)