



PATIENT INFORMATION BROCHURE

LATEX ALLERGY

- Latex is a natural sap from the rubber tree *Hevia brasiliensis*.
- This allergy usually affects healthcare workers and others (e.g. hairdressers) who have repeated exposure to latex-containing products. (Gloves and catheters.)
- Latex allergy is more likely to develop in individuals who have other allergies.

HOW DOES LATEX ALLERGY DEVELOP?

Latex proteins are foreign to the body. Repeated exposure to minute quantities of latex proteins results in the production of harmful IgE antibodies. Powdered gloves in a hospital environment facilitate the inhalation of latex proteins. Legislation prevents the use of powdered latex gloves in the State Hospitals in RSA.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LATEX ALLERGY?

Immediate Reactions

- hives /urticaria,
- itchy eyes,
- itchy or runny nose,
- sneezing,
- wheezing, coughing, asthma,
- swelling of the throat,
- anaphylaxis

DELAYED REACTIONS/CONTACT DERMATITIS

- Red, itchy /crusted lesions on exposed areas

HOW IS THE DIAGNOSIS MADE?

- A history of symptoms occurring within about an hour of exposure to gloves or other rubber products suggests latex allergy is highly suggestive.
- This can be confirmed by blood tests or by latex skin prick test.
- Prick Tests should always be conducted in a hospital with resuscitation facilities.
- It may be necessary to perform patch tests where contact dermatitis is suspected

HOW IS LATEX ALLERGY TREATED?

If you have a latex allergy, it is essential to avoid further exposure to latex to prevent progression of symptoms.

- Wear a Medic Alert Bracelet
- Carry injectable adrenaline and antihistamines
- Avoid direct or indirect exposure to latex.
- Inform your doctor and dentist
- Explain your allergy to your family members and close friends.
- Call your local emergency, ambulance and hospital to be sure they have their latex-free protocols in place
- Inform your hairdresser if you are having your hair tinted or highlighted.

HOW CAN LATEX BE AVOIDED IN THE HOSPITAL ENVIRONMENT?

- It is essential to identify and avoid high-risk areas that can result in latex sensitisation.
- Latex sensitive individuals should never wear latex gloves.
- Latex allergic individuals should work in a powder –free environment.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU NEED AN OPERATION OR MEDICAL PROCEDURE?

- You should inform your doctor, dentist or anesthetist.

- It is important that you are the first patient on the theatre list for the day to avoid any latex that may inadvertently be brought into theatre

WHAT ABOUT LATEX EXPOSURE OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL ENVIRONMENT?

- Latex is widely used in modern homes.(e.g. bicycle tyres, rubber bands, rubber toys, hot water bottles)
- Latex is also found in sports/leisure equipment (e.g. racket grip, squash balls, golfing gloves, wetsuits)

For additional reading, visit: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latex_allergy

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