



# NORTH TEXAS ALLERGY & ASTHMA ASSOCIATES

## PREBYTERIAN OFFICE

Professional Building 2  
8220 Walnut Hill Lane, Suite 101  
Dallas, TX 75231  
Tel: (214) 369-1901  
Fax: (214) 369-1905

## BAYLOR OFFICE

Medical Pavilion 1  
4708 Alliance Blvd, Suite 610  
Plano, TX 75093  
Tel: (972) 596-4383  
Fax: (972) 596-4325

Web: [www.texasallergyonline.com](http://www.texasallergyonline.com)

## LATEX ALLERGY

### What is latex?

Latex is a milky fluid produced by rubber trees (*Hevea brasiliensis*). Using different methods, latex can be processed into a variety of products, such as gloves and balloons. During manufacturing, chemicals are added to increase the speed of curing (vulcanization) and to protect the rubber from oxygen in the air. Products made from blends of natural rubber latex and other compounds are very common. In those with latex allergy, allergic reactions are most often triggered by dipped latex products. Products that commonly cause reactions can include gloves, balloons and condoms. In rare instances, people who are allergic to latex may also react to rubber bands, erasers, rubber parts of toys, various rubber components in medical devices, rubber elastic in clothes, or feeding nipples and pacifiers. Products molded from hard, crepe rubber, such as soles of shoes, are unlikely to cause reactions. Almost all latex paints are not a problem since they do not contain natural rubber latex.

### What types of allergic reactions happen to people allergic to latex?

There are two types of allergic reactions to latex. The first is delayed-type contact dermatitis, a poison ivy-like rash that appears 12-36 hours after contact with a latex product. This most commonly appears on the hands of people who wear latex gloves, but it may occur on other parts of the body following contact with rubber products. Contact dermatitis is usually the result of sensitization to chemicals during rubber processing. This form of allergy is not life-threatening.

Immediate (*IgE antibody-mediated*) allergic reactions are potentially the most serious form of allergic reactions to latex. Like other common forms of allergy, these reactions occur in people who have previously been exposed to latex and have become sensitized (latex-specific IgE antibody positive). With re-exposure, symptoms such as itching, swelling, sneezing, and wheezing may occur. Rarely, a person will experience life-threatening symptoms. This severe allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis. If not immediately treated, it can be fatal. The greatest danger of severe reactions occurs when latex comes into contact with moist areas of the body or internal surfaces during surgery, because more of the allergen can rapidly be absorbed into the body. Latex can also become airborne and cause respiratory symptoms. The use of non-powdered latex gloves or synthetic (vinyl, nitrile) gloves reduces the risk of these reactions.

### Who develops latex allergy?

Certain groups of individuals who are frequently exposed to latex are at high risk for developing immediate allergic reactions. Individuals with spina bifida (a congenital back problem) and those with congenital urinary tract problems who need multiple surgeries seem to have a risk of nearly 50%. Health care workers and others whose jobs require wearing latex gloves or working around them have a risk of about 10%. Others who may be at increased risk are those who have had many medical or surgical procedures, resulting in repeated exposure to latex gloves. Rubber industry workers also are at increased risk. The risk of sensitization to latex may be as high as 6%.

### What foods cross-react to latex?

People with latex allergy may experience an allergic reaction to some foods that contain some of the same allergenic proteins as those in latex. This reaction (cross-reactivity) can be triggered by bananas, avocados, kiwi and chestnuts.

### How do you diagnose latex allergy?

The first step in diagnosing latex allergy is awareness of the problem. Visit your doctor if you think you may have a latex allergy. After taking a detailed history and examining you, we will decide whether additional diagnostic tests for latex allergy are needed. If you are allergic to latex, you should avoid contact with natural rubber latex products.

### How do you treat patients with latex allergy?

Inform your family, health care professionals, employer and school personnel about your allergy. You may also want to wear a special bracelet or necklace that notifies others of your allergy. We will also determine whether you should carry injectable adrenalin (epinephrine) to provide immediate, emergency treatment in case you experience a severe allergic reaction.

You may try substituting synthetic (vinyl or nitrile) gloves for latex gloves, although they may not work as well in some situations. If you have significant latex allergy respiratory symptoms from inhaling latex particles, you need to avoid areas where powdered gloves are used frequently.