



## Risks

Health Care Workers (HCWs) are at high risk for the development of latex allergies. In the mid-eighties, the overall sensitization rate for HCWs nationwide was 2.9%. By 1992, the number increased to 10%, and in one hospital that year, it was 17%.

### *Those At Risk Include:*

- All individuals who regularly wear latex.
  - Sensitized individuals who have stopped wearing latex gloves. These persons are still at risk for further exposure if latex products continue to be used in their work place.
  - Atopic individuals (those who are prone to allergies).
  - Individuals who have a reaction when blowing up a balloon or eating certain fruits.
  - Those with hand dermatitis or other skin irritation, such as eczema.
  - Persons who have had multiple surgeries, especially if the surgeries were at an early age.
- It is estimated that 25-30% of atopic HCWs may become latex sensitized.*

### *Latex Surveys At UMDNJ*

In 1996, University Hospital and Occupational Medicine Services (Newark) conducted employee surveys concerning latex allergies. The results of both surveys indicated that a number of UMDNJ employees have experienced allergic reactions when wearing latex gloves.

## Health Hazards

Latex gloves may contain three materials which can cause skin irritation or allergic reactions:

**Latex Proteins** are present in natural rubber products such as latex gloves. The proteins can enter the body directly through the skin or by the inhalation of powder which has absorbed the latex proteins.

**Powder** is used during the glove manufacturing process. Skin irritation and dryness is the most common problem from powder. The powder is a major cause of latex sensitization since powder contaminated with latex proteins can be inhaled.

**Additives** such as carbamates, thiurams, mercaptobenzothiazine (MBT), and thioureas may be also present in latex or other medical gloves. These additives can cause a rash in the area that is in contact with the glove.

## Health Effects

The most serious health effect associated with latex glove use is an allergic reaction as the result of prior sensitization.

Allergic reactions can occur due to skin contact or inhalation of glove powder which has absorbed latex proteins from the glove material. The symptoms can get progressively worse with continued exposure.

## Symptoms

A skin rash can be localized or may spread beyond the area where the glove touches the skin. Only a physician can determine whether a skin rash is due to latex proteins or to other chemicals in the gloves.

**Wheezing, shortness of breath, tearing eyes or other allergic systemic symptoms** can occur.

**Anaphylactic reaction**, which can be life threatening, is possible with continued exposure.

### *What Should I Do If I Have Symptoms?*

- Report symptoms to the supervisor.
  - Complete an Incident Report (Form 70).
  - Forward a copy of the Incident Report to Risk and Claims, and EOHSS.
- Staff will be referred for medical evaluation by Risk and Claims, and EOHSS will investigate.*

## Prevention



Since the mid 1980's, efforts to prevent occupational transmissions of bloodborne pathogens (HIV, Hepatitis B & C) have led to the routine use of gloves by HCWs for every task.

However, not all patient care activities require gloves, for example: feeding babies, bathing patients, performing a mammogram or chest X-ray. In fact, glove use in these instances may be seen as offensive by the patient and their family.

### Use The Appropriate Glove

In order to select the most appropriate glove, list all work tasks, determine which of those tasks need gloves, and then choose the appropriate type of glove for each task.

Latex gloves are never necessary for tasks with no possible exposure to blood or body fluids. For tasks involving heavy exposure to blood or body fluids, non-latex gloves which are as protective as latex are available.

If latex gloves are worn, only non-powdered gloves which have very low allergen concentrations should be considered. (Contact EOHSS for charts listing acceptable non-latex and low latex protein gloves).

**Powdered gloves of any type should not be worn if non-powdered gloves are available.**

An increasing number of patients are allergic to latex. Therefore, non-latex surgical and examination gloves are an important step in preventing sensitization in these people. This is especially critical for pediatric surgery and surgery in which there are exposed mucosal surfaces.

Latex gloves do not adequately protect against most hazardous chemicals. Contact your glove supplier or EOHSS for information on glove selection for chemical hazards.

### Any questions?

Call the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety Services (EOHSS):

Newark  
**(973) 972-4812**

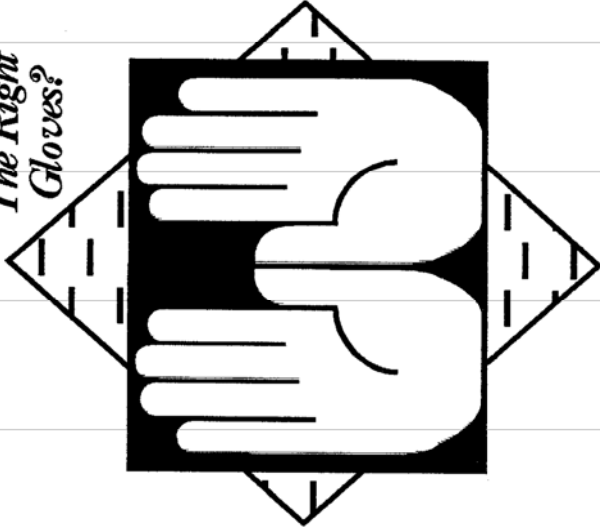
Scotch Plains  
**(908) 889-2486**

Piscataway/New Brunswick  
**(732) 235-4058**

Stratford/Camden  
**(609) 566-6189**

## Latex Allergies:

*Are You  
Wearing  
The Right  
Gloves?*



The next time you reach for a pair of gloves, check the box. If they are made of latex, you may be putting yourself at risk for allergic sensitization, especially if the gloves are powdered.



**E ♦ O ♦ H ♦ S ♦ S**  
Environmental & Occupational  
Health & Safety Services



*This fact sheet was prepared by  
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**Environmental & Occupational Health  
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*in cooperation with the*

**UMDNJ Latex Allergy Taskforce**  
*for the use of University staff*