

LATEX SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Latex refers to the natural rubber content in a product. These products contain particles (latex proteins) which when touched or inhaled create an allergic reaction within a latex sensitive individual. Latex allergies have dramatically increased during the last decade. This increase can be directly attributed to the increased use of latex products (especially gloves and balloons). Efforts to protect both the caregivers and consumers from pathogens have precipitated the use of latex gloves for many purposes.

The latex allergy is an acquired allergy, meaning the sensitization has occurred through past exposures to the allergen (in this case latex). The symptoms of a latex allergy can vary from mild to severe and occur after exposure to a latex product or the latex protein on a surface or in the air. The symptoms of a latex allergy may include: hives, runny nose, sneezing, headaches, itchy eyes, sore or hoarse voice, abdominal cramping, chest tightness, wheezing or shortness of breath (asthma), anaphylaxis.

Populations at risk to develop latex sensitivity/allergy are:

1. Students with spina bifida
2. Students who have had multiple surgeries
3. Students who have multiple allergies (such as ragweed or food allergies to avocado, potato, banana, tomato, chestnuts, kiwi fruit, papaya)
4. Staff with occupational exposure (custodian, food service, school nurse and health aides)

Steps to create a latex safe school environment:

1. Identify students/staff with sensitivities or allergic reactions.
2. School Nurse to discuss allergy with parents/staff member and plan for school safety needs (staff will be made aware of a latex sensitive student/staff member and what plan of care to follow).
3. Student/staff should wear identification bracelet.
4. Parents/staff member will provide emergency medication at school if indicated.
5. Latex balloons will not be allowed in the school buildings.
6. Latex free gloves must be worn by students/staff with a latex sensitivity/allergy and by students and staff.
7. Frequently clean school areas contaminated with latex dust (upholstery, carpets ventilation ducts).
8. Frequently change the ventilation filters and vacuum bags used in latex-contaminated areas.
9. Potential latex exposures in the classroom include erasers, art supplies, rubber bands, glue, stickers. If indicated in student's plan of care latex free school supplies should be used and supplied by the student's parent/guardian.

10. Potential latex exposure in cafeteria includes food prepared by person wearing latex gloves or the use of rubber utensils. Latex free gloves are to be worn by all food service personnel and non-rubber utensils should be used.
11. Potential latex exposures on the playground/gym include all types of balls, gym floors, gym mats, and rubber tires. Provide latex free equipment if indicated in student's plan of care. If latex free equipment is not available, place a barrier between the student and the latex.
12. Potential latex exposure in health rooms include band-aids, elastic bandages, first aid supplies, rubber stoppers in syringes, blood pressure cuffs, stethoscope tubing. Provide latex free first aid supplies if indicated in student's plan of care.

Types of adverse reactions a student/staff may experience upon coming in contact with a product that contains latex:

1. **Irritant contact dermatitis** - the development of dry, itchy, irritated areas on the skin, usually the hands. This reaction is caused by skin irritation from using gloves and possibly by exposure to other workplace products and chemicals. This is not considered an allergic reaction. Plan of care: Latex free gloves should be worn to reduce the potential for irritation and are recommended for individuals prone to irritant reactions.
2. **Allergic contact dermatitis (delayed hypersensitivity)** - an allergic reaction caused by the chemical used during processing of latex. Symptoms are itching, redness, vesicles, edema, and skin thickening. Skin manifestations may extend beyond area of contact. The rash usually begins 24-48 hours after contact. Plan of care: Call parents and monitor at school. Student/staff member to wear only non-latex powder free gloves.
3. **Latex allergy** - reactions usually occur within minutes to hours after exposure. Signs and symptoms are itching, hives, skin redness. More severe reactions may involve respiratory symptoms such as runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, difficulty breathing, coughing spells, and wheezing, tachycardia, hypotension and cardiac arrest.

Plan of care:

- Authorized personnel to administer emergency medication (if indicated in student's/staff member's plan of care).
- Call 911 to transport to an Emergency Medical Facility.
- Initiate CPR if cardiac or airway problems.

Adopted: October 5, 2009