Recognizing Latex Allergies

Some people are allergic to latex rubber. The following information helps to recognize the signs of an allergic reaction and what to do to help if needed.

What is latex?
Latex is a milky fluid found in milk weed, poppies, rubber trees and plants that produce rubber. Latex can be found in many products used in the home, schools, hospitals and workplaces.

Which people are at risk for an allergic reaction?
Anyone can develop an allergy to latex. People who are in contact with latex products often are more likely to become allergic to latex. People who are at a greater risk are listed below.
1. Has had many surgical procedures
2. Has allergy to tropical fruits (banana, kiwi, avocado, papaya)
3. Has asthma
4. Has spina bifida or birth defects of the genitourinary system
5. Makes or uses latex products in the workplace

What are some products that might cause a reaction?
- rubber balloons
- rubber toys or balls
- pacifiers, nipples, teething toys
- rubber boots or raincoats
- rubber gloves
- rubber bands or elastic
- paper or cloth adhesive tape
- rubber catheters
- elastic on legs or waist of clothing, bras
- elastic bandages or Band-aids
- pantyhose
- tires
- racquet handle
- chewing gum
- condoms

What are the signs of a latex allergy reaction?
If you have itching, flushing (redness of skin), wheezing or runny nose after blowing up a balloon or have contact with balloons, rubber gloves or any product containing latex, you may have a latex allergy. Look for:
- Skin rash or redness
- Hives, welts, or swelling anywhere on the body
- Eyes that are irritated or tearing
- Wheezing, sneezing or coughing
- Itchy skin
- Pain or tightness in the chest
- Difficulty breathing
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
Allergies can range from mild symptoms or life-threatening.

What should I do if I show signs of an allergic reaction to latex?
1. Remove the latex object that is causing the reaction. Follow the treatment plan given to you by your doctor.
2. If you have difficulty breathing or feel pain or tightness in the chest, call for an ambulance or call “911” immediately.
3. Tell health care professionals (day care or school staff if applicable) of your latex allergy. Avoid contact with latex products.
4. Buy a medical alert bracelet that reads “Allergy to Latex.” The bracelet can be found at most drug stores.
5. Your doctor may want you to carry an epinephrine (“e-peh-nef-rin”) device for emergencies. Your doctor will teach you how to use the device if needed.

What are examples of products to use instead?
- vinyl or plastic gloves
- mylar balloons
- catheters made of plastic, silicone or vinyl
- silk tape
- plastic toys

Who should I call if I have questions?
Please call your doctor or clinic nurse for help with questions or concerns about latex rubber allergies.