



Policy

Saskatoon & Area - Occupational Health & Safety

Number: 51-004

Title: Chemical Hazard: Latex Allergy

Saskatchewan Employment Act:

OHS Regulation: 7-1, 7-2

Date: January 1, 2017

Date Revised/Reaffirmed: December 2, 2021

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Preamble

Natural rubber latex (NRL):

- Referred to as “latex”, is a natural milky substance harvested from the Hevea brasiliensis tree that grows in the tropical climate of Southeast Asia
- It is used in the manufacture of many household, industrial, and medical products, including surgical and examination gloves
- It is composed of rubber, water, and low levels of different types of proteins (compounds that occur naturally in all plants and animals)

Synthetic latex:

- These materials do not contain natural rubber latex proteins, but may contain chemicals that are used in the manufacture and processing of both natural rubber latex and synthetic latex products
- There are a variety of synthetic latex formulations such as nitrile and neoprene

Objective

- To **eliminate** occupational exposure to Latex (removal of rubber glove allergens) and **implement** substitution of all Latex products where applicable
- To ensure all SHA workers receive optimum education, assessment, treatment and follow up for latex allergies

Definitions

Adverse skin reactions from the use of NRL gloves have been classified into 3 distinct diagnostic categories:

Irritant Contact Dermatitis:

- It is a non-immune reaction
- Local reaction from damage to the skin from such things such as detergents, frequent hand washing, inadequate drying, climate extremes, pre-existing dermatitis, aggressive scrubbing techniques, and glove powders
- This reaction is simply an irritation of the skin and should not be confused with an allergy
- It is a surface condition affecting the skin, avoiding contact with the irritants, including glove powders, and a regular regimen of proper skin care will help keep hands healthier and free of irritation
- Signs include: Redness, chapping, chafing, dryness, scaling, cracking, and subjective symptoms such as itching and burning

Delayed Contact Dermatitis – Type IV:

- The usual delayed hypersensitivity reaction of allergic contact dermatitis is caused not by latex, but by the chemical added during rubber manufacture
- Signs include: red, raised, and palpable area at, and sometimes slightly beyond, the area of contact with the glove may be observed, accompanied by subjective symptoms such as itching, burning, and tingling
- The mechanism for the development of a delayed response requires the antigen to penetrate the skin, where it then interacts with the cellular components of the immune system
- These effects typically appear anywhere from 6 – 48 hours following exposure to the antigen-containing product, and can last for up to 4 days
- Use of latex gloves while you have active, open breaks in the skin is believed to contribute to latex protein sensitization. This is due to absorption of latex proteins associated with the product

Immediate Type 1 Response Latex Allergy:

- This reaction is not solely the result of exposure to gloves, but also to other natural rubber latex based products such as condoms, balloons, rubber nipples, and other latex medical equipment
- Much less common than delayed reactions, but has a potentially serious outcome
- Signs include: swelling and redness (commonly described as a “wheal and flare” reaction) local to the site of exposure, accompanied by non-specific symptoms such as itching and burning
- Can occur almost instantly (within 30 minutes) following exposure to the relevant antigen
- Symptoms can spread to areas remote from the site of contact with the glove, and can be accompanied by others such as conjunctivitis, rhinitis, and bronchial obstruction
- Serious but rarely, anaphylaxis can occur

Roles and Responsibilities

Employer must ensure:

- All products containing latex are identified
- A powder free, latex safe environment is provided
- All latex products are reviewed, replaced with alternatives and evaluated. When applicable convert to nitrile or neoprene products

Manager/Supervisor must ensure:

- That roles and responsibilities of all workers are being met, as well as applicable legislation and/or standards
- Safe work procedures are written and followed
- All products containing latex are identified and communicated to employees
- Latex products that have replacement alternatives, should be substituted with other materials, processes and/or equipment
- A latex safe environment is established with safe work processes and practices to workers, patients and family members
- Education is provided for all workers, patients and family members

Worker must ensure:

- That all policies and procedures related to Latex Allergies are understood and are followed
- Education is reviewed as required

- They report to their supervisor and the Safety Alert System/Incident Report Line any incidents or near misses involving a latex allergy

Orientation & Training

- On-going education and knowledge towards remaining latex products and when alternatives have been selected

Materials

- [Latex Safe Poster](#)

Non-Compliance/Breach:

Non-compliance with this policy will result in a review of the incident. A review for non-compliance may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or privileges; fines and /or prosecution of individuals under the Saskatchewan Employment Act and OHS Regulations.

Resources

- Policy and Procedure Nursing Manual, Latex Allergy policy 1011 <https://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/about/NursingManual/1011.pdf>

Review Dates:

January 1, 2017

April 20, 2018

December 2, 2021