

Let's Talk About...

Latex Allergy

Many people are allergic to a rubber material called latex (lay-tex). Latex is from the milky sap of rubber trees. Latex is all around us. We use latex to make rubber. It is in toys, clothing, rubber tires, rubber bands, rubber gloves, some plants (poinsettia, spurge, ficus trees, rubber plants), and many other items. Latex contains proteins that cause allergies in some people. These people are often healthcare workers who use many latex items. Children who have lots of healthcare can also become allergic to latex. They, too, have contact with rubber during many procedures and care.

What are the signs of a latex allergy?

- Red skin or bump after touching rubber
- Itchy or swollen lips after a dental visit
- Runny or itchy eyes after touching rubber
- Pain or a tight feeling in the chest
- Trouble breathing
- Any of these signs after playing with balloons

If you notice any of these signs, call your healthcare provider right away.

Will my child become allergic?

Some children may be more likely to become allergic to latex than others. These children tend to have one or more of the following:

- Multiple operations since birth
- Spina bifida
- Birth defects of the genito-urinary system
- Food allergies, especially to bananas, kiwis, tomatoes, peaches, and cherries

If your child has any of these, she should avoid items with rubber. This is true even if your child has never had any of the signs of allergy listed above. Staying away from rubber will help keep your child from becoming allergic.

What if my child is already allergic?

There is no cure for allergies. The best thing you can do is help your child stay away from latex items.

- Keep your child away from latex. For example, use Mylar balloons instead of latex balloons (ask at the Primary Children's Hospital information desks about the differences between these balloons). Use vinyl or plastic gloves instead of rubber gloves. Provide her with plastic or vinyl toys.
- Let all healthcare workers know about your child's allergy. Be sure your child's allergy is written in her medical chart. The hospital should use non-latex products with your child. For example, they should use plastic catheters and silk tape.
- Avoid using latex urinary catheters, red rubber catheters used for irrigations, and enema tubes.
- Talk with your doctor or nurse about a MEDICAL ALERT bracelet for your child.
- Talk with your doctor or nurse about emergency medicine that you can keep at home in case your child has an allergic reaction. Make sure the syringe to give these medications does not contain latex.

Should my child have an allergy tests?

- You can have your children tested to see if she is allergic to latex. Talk to your healthcare provider if you would like to have this test.