

Arizona Division of Occupational Safety and Health Hazard Highlight

LATEX ALLERGIES

Latex allergy reactions result from exposure to either the proteins or chemicals found in natural rubber latex products. The proteins may also adhere to the powder used on some gloves to make them easier to put on and take off. Regular and repeated use of latex gloves can result in the wearer becoming highly sensitive to the proteins or chemicals found in any latex product.

Risks

Latex gloves have proved effective in preventing transmission of many infectious diseases to health care workers. But for some workers, exposures to latex may result in allergic reactions. Reports of such reactions have increased in recent years—especially among crop harvesting field workers as they are now required by employers to wear gloves. In addition to health care, other workers who are at risk but with less frequent glove use include hairdressers, housekeepers, food service workers, and child care workers.

Symptoms

Symptoms of latex allergy can include skin rash and irritation, hives, nasal congestion, asthma, and in rare instances, shock. Individuals who develop an allergy to latex may also have similar cross-reactions to certain foods (e.g., avocado, banana, potato, tomato, kiwi fruit and papaya). Individuals prone to allergy are

at greatest risk for developing an allergy to latex. In addition, many individuals may experience hypersensitivity reactions, such as skin rash, from chemicals used in the production of glove products.

Prevention

In many instances, depending on the exposure, workers can get the required level of protection from nitrile, vinyl or other synthetic gloves. When latex gloves are used, powder-free gloves with reduced protein content should be used. It is important to keep in mind that the Bloodborne Pathogen Standard states that glove alternatives shall be accessible to those employees who are allergic to the gloves normally provided.

Regulations

ADOSH standards require employers to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards. Where the potential for latex allergy is a recognized hazard in your workplace, hazard reduction methods should be included in your overall accident prevention program. These should include procedures for promptly evaluating and addressing complaints or concerns from employees regarding health conditions attributable to latex use.

For more information:

**ADOSH
602-542-5795 or 520-628-5478**

On the web at:

http://www.ica.state.az.us/ADOSH/ADOSH_main.aspx