

Latex Allergies

Allergies to Natural Rubber Latex (NRL) have become a serious problem for a growing number of people, including many of our students and staff. Exposure to any product containing latex can cause symptoms including: hives, sneezing, asthma and even life threatening anaphylactic shock. With the exception of Epinephrine (ex. Epi-Pen) for treating anaphylaxis, the only treatment is avoidance. Creating awareness through education is essential in preventing latex exposure for sensitized individuals.

Latex can be found in classroom supplies (ex. erasers, rubber bands, science lab equipment) and in gymnasium equipment (rubber mats, flooring, balls, racquet handles). Rubber gloves used by cafeteria workers and custodians can leave a residue on surfaces or release NRL proteins into the air. School bus tires also can release high levels of NRL particles, especially during heavy traffic. **Two other often overlooked sources of latex exposure are rubber balloons brought into schools for celebrations (also a choking hazard) and tennis balls, which are often sliced open and placed on chair legs to reduce noise from sliding chairs.** This use of tennis balls abrades the natural rubber latex bladder, introducing latex dust into the school environment. Other materials in tennis balls are also sources of respiratory track irritants (bad for asthmatics), including fibers and volatile organic compounds.

To combat NRL exposure, school personnel should be aware of the risks that latex poses to sensitized students and staff and take appropriate precautions. It is recommended that the use of materials containing Latex be limited in school buildings to reduce the likelihood of possible life threatening symptoms in sensitive individuals. Use of non-latex gloves is recommended for: custodians, cafeteria workers, nurse's offices, science labs etc., as well as latex free health supplies including bandaids, ace bandages and equipment such as blood pressure cuffs. A list of latex free school supplies is available on the American Latex Allergy Association <http://latexallergyresources.org/consumer-products>

Thank you for promoting health and safety in the school community.

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