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Spina Bifida  
Hydrocephalus  
Scotland



# Latex Allergy





## What is latex?

Latex is a cloudy white liquid which comes from a rubber tree. Once a liquid has been tapped from the tree, chemicals are added to it which provide the strength and elasticity of many common rubber products. The increased incidence of latex sensitivity is thought to be related to the general increase in the use of latex products.



## How can latex allergy affect people with spina bifida?

Sensitivity to latex can be a problem for people with spina bifida because of the frequency with which they come into contact with it. Many healthcare products contain latex so people with spina bifida are exposed to it on a regular basis, either during surgery through the use of latex gloves and anaesthetic equipment or during bladder and bowel management through the use of latex tubing, gloves and catheters.



## What symptoms will I notice?

The reactions that can occur can range from mild irritation of the skin to more serious general manifestations of major shock (anaphylaxis). Latex allergy quite often presents first as a rash but may also show itself as a hay fever- type reaction such as itchy or swollen eyes, runny nose and sneezing. Some people may also develop asthma-type symptoms such as chest tightness, wheezing, coughing and shortness of breath.

Although it is uncommon, some people who are allergic to latex can suffer a potentially life-threatening reaction called anaphylactic shock. This occurs within minutes of exposure and may be fatal if not treated promptly by an adrenaline injection. Anaphylactic shock is characterized by generalized hives, breathing difficulties and low blood pressure. It is more likely to occur during direct tissue contact with natural rubber latex products.

The best way to find out if you have an allergy to latex is through a blood or skin test.

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## If you have a latex allergy...

Avoid contact with natural rubber products. Substitutes are available for most commonly used items. Ensure all your Health Professionals are aware of your allergy and alerts are included in all your clinical notes. Teaching staff at school and employers should also be aware of what should be avoided and appropriate action to take. Consult your GP about medication you can take to reduce the allergy symptoms. Carry an alert card or wear a Medi-Alert bracelet.



## Some common products which include latex

• Household gloves • Hospital gloves • Condoms • Wheelchair tyres • Adhesive tapes • Urinary catheters and enema tubing • Protective sheets • Balloons and rubber balls • Art supplies • Some dental equipment • Baby bottle teats and dummies • Beach toys • Chewing gum.



## Interesting!

Some people who are allergic to latex also have allergies to certain foods. So if your mouth itches when you eat any of the following foods, you could be allergic to latex as well.

**Bananas, Potatoes, Avacados, Tomatoes, Kiwi Fruit, Mangoes, Chestnuts.**



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If you have questions or would like further information, please call the **SBH Scotland Helpline** on **03455 211 300** or email **support@sbhscotland.org.uk**  
For general enquiries call **03455 211 811** or visit **www.sbhscotland.org.uk**

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