



## LATEX (NATURAL RUBBER) ALLERGY IN SPINA BIFIDA

The first reports of latex allergies in people with Spina Bifida were in the late 1980s. Today, experts think latex could be a problem for up to 73 percent of children and youth with Spina Bifida.

No one knows why people are allergic to latex. Some experts think it's because people have too much contact with it. People with Spina Bifida that have or have had shunts, other allergies and a lot of surgeries may be at a more risk than others. Latex also can be a problem for anyone else who has a lot of contact with it.

### Latex items

Latex can be in anything. It's hard to tell if something has latex in it. So the FDA makes companies label medical devices when they have natural latex rubber in them. However, other types of things still do not need labels.

Latex is in a lot of items like gloves, bandages, balloons and condoms. Signs of an allergic reaction include:

- watery and itchy eyes;
- sneezing and coughing;
- rash or hives;
- swelling of the windpipe;
- wheezing;
- a hard time breathing; and
- life-threatening collapse of blood circulation.

The only way to not have a latex reaction is to avoid things with latex or latex-contaminated powder. Contact occurs when latex touches the skin, mouth, eyes, genital areas or bladder. Severe reactions can take place if latex enters the bloodstream. Powder from latex balloons or gloves can get into the air. This is a problem when breathed or touched by a person who is allergic. Food touched by people wearing latex gloves might have this powder on it. (People allergic to latex may also be allergic to some fruits and vegetables.)

Latex allergy is not fully understood. Experts are still learning what proteins cause it. They hope to make better tests and products that don't make people sick. They also hope to help people tolerate latex.

### Steps to take

Spina Bifida Association • 4590 MacArthur Boulevard NW • Suite 250 • Washington, DC 20007-4226

Tel: 202.944.3285 • Fax: 202.944.3295 • National Resource Center: 800.621.3141

Website: <http://www.spinabifidaassociation.org> E-mail: [sbaa@sbaa.org](mailto:sbaa@sbaa.org)

Community Health Charities #10559

Experts believe people with Spina Bifida are at high risk of latex allergy. It could even be life-threatening. People with Spina Bifida and their families should think about the following. Then they should talk to their health care team.

- All people with Spina Bifida should be considered at high risk for having an allergic reaction to natural latex. They should avoid latex products right from birth. Things made of silicone, plastic, nitrile or vinyl can be used instead.
- Those who had a reaction to latex should:
  - wear a medic-alert bracelet or necklace;
  - carry auto-injectable epinephrine; and
  - carry sterile non-latex gloves and other non-latex medical items for emergencies.
- Discuss latex allergy and avoidance with health care providers, schools, day cares, camps, visitors and anyone else who is involved with the person who is allergic.
- Talk to health care providers before hospitalization or surgery to prevent accidents and for latex-safe care.

The following items may be risky for people with a latex allergy:

- Health care items with latex: gloves, catheters, tourniquets, elastic/ace bandages, IV tubing injection ports, vial stoppers, adhesive tape, dental dams and Band-aids.
- Other items with latex: balloons, pacifiers, rubber bands, stretchy clothes, beach toys, Koosh balls, bottle nipples, condoms, diaphragms, diapers and art supplies.

This is not a full list. People with Spina Bifida and their families should learn more about what is used to make the things they touch. The Spina Bifida Association has a bigger list of items at [www.spinabifidaassociation.org](http://www.spinabifidaassociation.org). You can also call 800-621-3141.

## Online Resources

Latex Allergy Links

[www.latexallergylinks.org](http://www.latexallergylinks.org)

American Latex Allergy Association/ALERT

[www.latexallergyresources.org](http://www.latexallergyresources.org)

Decent Exposures (latex-free undergarments)

800-524-4949

[www.decentexposures.com](http://www.decentexposures.com)

OSHA

[www.osha.gov/SLTC/latexallergy](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/latexallergy)

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology  
[www.aaaaaai.org](http://www.aaaaaai.org)

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**Questions?**

Call 800-621-3141

Web: [www.spinabifidaassociation.org](http://www.spinabifidaassociation.org)

*This information does not constitute medical advice for any individual. As specific cases may vary from the general information presented here, SBA advises readers to consult a qualified medical or other professional on an individual basis.*

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