



LATEX ALLERGY: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Anyone using latex gloves is at risk of developing an allergic reaction to free latex protein or chemicals residues left over from the manufacturing process.

Although the chance of this happening is small it is important that you take precautions to minimise the risk: allergic reactions can on occasion be life threatening and, as latex (natural rubber) is found in a vast number of everyday objects, latex allergy could affect you in many areas of your life.

Avoiding the problem

1. Only use latex gloves if they offer a clear advantage over other types of protective glove. For information on selecting the right glove for a job check the guidance on the Occupational Health web pages on Spectrum.

Link: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/spectrum/occhealth/advice/gloveselectionguidance.htm>

2. Make sure the glove you use meets the College's quality standard, for latex gloves i.e. powder free and those with extractable proteins $>50\mu\text{g/g}$. The latex gloves available through the Purchasing web site meets or exceeds the standard.

Link: <http://www.purchasing.ad.ic.ac.uk>

3. Always wash and dry your hands after removing gloves.

4. If you suffer from dry skin or dermatitis or need to wash your hands often, use an emollient cream after washing. For more information on hand care see the Hand Care Information on the Occupational health web pages.

Link: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/spectrum/occhealth/advice/glovehandandskin.htm>

The most likely allergic reaction to latex is dermatitis.

The first signs are often reddening or itching of the skin on the hands or wrists. Small areas of skin may swell up, similar to nettle rash, or tiny blisters may appear on fingers. With repeated exposure skin can become dry and sore with small fissures developing.

Depending on the type of allergic reaction symptoms may not develop until some hours after wearing latex gloves, although they can occur immediately on contact or during use.

Occasionally skin reactions can occur on other areas of the body e.g. eyelids or facial skin. Latex can also trigger other types of allergic reaction such as asthma, although this is very rare with non-powdered gloves, unless the person is highly allergic.

What to do if you think you have developed an allergy

If you develop any rash on your hands or other symptoms that you suspect may be caused by an allergic reaction to latex, you should contact the College Occupational Health Service for advice. We can arrange tests to check for latex allergy and provide advice on how to manage any skin problems or other allergic reactions.

If you are already know you are allergic to latex you should inform your manager/supervisor. You should also get in contact with Occupational Health.

The College Occupational Health Service is based on the South Kensington campus. Contact details are as follows:

Telephone: 020 7594 9401 (int: 49401) and E-mail: occhealth@imperial.ac.uk