

# LATEX MINIMIZATION

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PHHS Pathology



# Objectives

- At the end of this module, the participant should be able to correctly:
  - Identify potential latex components of the work environment
  - Describe the signs of a latex allergy
  - Discuss the two groups of high-risk individuals for latex allergy
  - Communicate ways to avoid increasing latex sensitivity
  - Utilize non-latex supplies when working with a patient with a latex allergy
  - Understand their responsibility in the laboratory team to guard against latex allergies

# PHHS Latex Policy

- Parkland Policy #30-15 focuses on the reduction of latex exposure among staff, students, patients, and visitors.
  - This is to reduce latex exposure to the maximum extent possible, thus minimizing sensitization and development of new latex allergy cases.
- The Department of Pathology uses non-latex gloves to comply with PHHS Policy #30-15 “Latex Minimization/Safety Plan”.

# What is Latex?

- Latex is produced through a manufacturing process from natural rubber.
- Common latex products include:
  - Medical gloves
  - Anesthesia masks
  - Electrode pads
  - Crutch pads
  - Bandages
  - Wheelchair tires
  - Drug vial stoppers
  - And much, much more



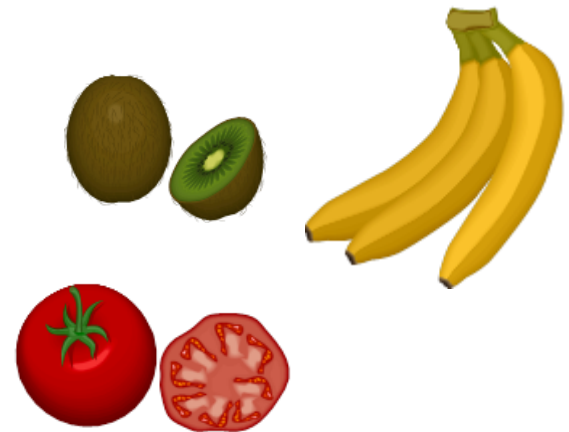
# Allergy to Latex



- Allergic reactions occur when an individual has a predisposition to natural latex.
- The degree to which a sensitivity/reaction exists depends upon the sensitivity of the patient.
  - Responses range from mild irritation to respiratory distress.
- Latex allergic reactions are often mistaken for skin irritation.
- Most people are not automatically sensitive to most substances, but they develop an allergic reaction after being exposed to the substance.
- There is no way to predict the severity of a reaction.

# High Risk for Latex?

- There are two (2) main ways to identify high-risk people.
  - 1. Individuals with frequent exposure:
    - Healthcare workers
    - Rubber industry workers
    - Patients who have undergone multiple procedures
  - 2. Individuals who are allergic to:
    - Banana
    - Tomato
    - Kiwi
    - Avocado
    - Potato
    - And many other foods



# Why should you care?

- Simply put, allergic reactions to latex can be very serious and may cause death!



# How to tell if you're allergic to latex?

- First, ask yourself if you're in either of the high-risk groups
- Secondly, ask yourself if you've had a reaction to latex
  - Hives or rash on skin after exposure to latex
  - Itchy, watery or swollen eyes
  - Runny nose and sneezing
  - Asthmatic reactions (coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, and respiratory distress)





# How to tell if you're allergic to latex?

- Signs that you may have an allergy to latex
  - Swollen lips after visiting the dentist or blowing up a balloon
  - Rashes after using latex gloves, band-aids, or other medical tapes

## Remember...

- Any employee who is exposed to latex is at risk for developing latex allergies
- The longer you are exposed to latex, the more serious your reactions will become
- All reactions to latex can increase your sensitivity.

**You must report them all!**

# Anaphylaxis Reactions

Anaphylactic reactions are serious, and all employees should recognize their symptoms:

- Skin eruptions or burning sensations
- Light-headedness or loss of consciousness due to blood pressure drop
- Swelling which may obstruct the nose, mouth and throat
- Asthma-like symptoms

**React Immediately! Anaphylactic shock is a medical emergency. Seek medical help immediately!**

1. Notify a supervisor
2. Take the affected employee to the ER or call **911**

# Avoiding Latex

- If you are allergic, you can decrease your chances of developing sensitivity by:
  - Wearing non-latex gloves
  - Avoid oil-based creams
    - Oils dissolve latex and allow allergens to penetrate skin
  - Change gloves often
  - If you have a rash, wear a cotton liner under gloves
  - Inform doctors/dentists about your allergy before your treatment.
  - Notify Employee Health & your physician of allergy symptoms for treatment.
  - Wear a Medic Alert bracelet.
  - Carry an epinephrine (adrenaline) kit.



# Avoiding Latex

Remember that your patients may also be allergic to latex. If a patient reports latex sensitivity, avoid using latex tourniquets, bandages, and gloves.



# How do I know if something has latex?



- As of 1998, all medical products containing natural rubber latex or dry natural rubber must be properly labeled as such.
- Furthermore, all medical products packed in these forms of latex must also be labeled.
- If you cannot discover whether or not a product contains latex, you should probably not use it in the presence of someone sensitive to latex.

# Who is responsible in guarding against latex allergies?

- Answer: **We all are!!**
  - Everyone is responsible to watch out for the symptoms of latex allergies.
  - Your employer, once they know of any threat, should inform the employees of actions to prevent occupational injury in the face of that threat.
- Your employer should help prevent your injury by...
  - Training you about the nature of the threat
  - Instituting policies and procedures to prevent your injury from that threat.
  - Providing non-latex alternatives wherever possible

# The Laboratory Team

- Finally, remember that latex allergies can be very serious.
- When the Laboratory Team (you, your colleagues, and leadership) works together, we can effectively address the issue of latex allergy.
- **Communication is key!**
  - Communicate with the team if there are supplies which do not offer a non-latex option.
  - Keep everyone up-to-date and well-informed as to the latex status of equipment and supplies.

