

# PLAYING IT **SAFE**

Be safe and healthy on the job at Personal Assistance Options with these helpful tips provided by Arbury Insurance Agency

## Home Health Care: Preventing Latex Allergies

*Helpful tips for reducing your risk of injury at work*

Latex products are made from natural rubber, and sensitivity can develop after repeated exposure. Limiting exposure to latex can help prevent allergic reactions for both home health care workers and their clients.

### Latex Exposure Reactions

Three types of reactions can occur when using latex products:

1. Irritant contact dermatitis—This is the most common negative reaction to latex. Symptoms include dry, itchy, irritated skin, most often on the hands.
2. Allergic contact dermatitis (delayed hypersensitivity)—The skin reaction looks like the rash from contact with poison ivy and usually shows up 24 to 96 hours after contact.
3. Latex allergy (immediate hypersensitivity)—This type of reaction usually happens within minutes of exposure, but symptoms can also show up a few hours later.

Symptoms of a mild reaction are skin redness, hives or itching. Symptoms of more serious reactions might include runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, wheezing, coughing or difficulty breathing.

Rarely, shock may occur, but a life-threatening reaction is seldom the first sign of sensitivity. A latex-

exposed worker developing any serious allergic reactions should be taken to a doctor immediately.

### Protect Yourself From Latex

The amount of latex exposure needed to cause an allergic reaction is unknown, but increased exposure to latex does increase your risk of developing symptoms.

Follow these guidelines to limit your exposure and your chance of developing a latex allergy:

- Use non-latex gloves for activities not likely to involve contact with infectious materials.
- Request gloves that do not contain latex but still offer protection against infectious materials.
- Ask for reduced-protein, powder-free gloves if your employer supplies latex gloves.
- Avoid oil-based creams or lotions when using latex gloves. They may cause the gloves to break down.
- Wash your hands with a mild soap and dry them completely after using latex gloves.
- Recognize symptoms of latex allergy: rash; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye and sinus irritation; asthma; and shock.



### Did You Know?

According to the American Latex Allergy Association, 8 to 17 percent of health care workers are latex sensitive, which is a large number considering less than 1 percent of the general population in the United States is latex sensitive.

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- Until you can see a doctor, avoid direct contact with latex gloves and other latex-containing products if you develop symptoms of latex allergy.

## **Working With a Latex Allergy**

If you are diagnosed with a latex allergy, you can still work safely. Be sure to:

- Avoid touching, using or being near latex-containing products.
- Avoid areas where latex is likely to be inhaled (for example, where powdered latex gloves are being used).
- Inform your employer and your personal health care professionals that you have a latex allergy.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet.
- Follow your doctor's recommendations about latex allergy.
- Before receiving any shots (such as a flu shot), be sure the person giving it uses a latex-free vial stopper.
- Before undergoing a medical procedure or surgery, consult with the specialist who will perform the procedure about any modifications that may be needed.

