



## 017 - The Use of Latex Products Procedure

Document Control	
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## 1. Introduction: What is Natural Rubber Latex?

Natural Rubber Latex (NRL) is a milky fluid obtained from trees in South East Asia and other countries and is an integral part of everyday living and working.

## 2. Latex Allergies

There are 2 types of Latex Allergy: one caused by natural proteins and the other caused by the chemicals used to convert NRL into a useable item. They are called Type 1 and Type IV Allergies respectively.

### **Type IV: Symptoms:**

include red itchy scaly rash (sometimes called contact dermatitis), and often localised to the area of use e.g. the wrists and forearms caused by glove use – but this may spread to other areas. Some people experience Rhinitis and Conjunctivitis also.

Management of Type IV: Occupational Health advice should be sought and the avoidance of the allergen where possible.

### **Type 1: Symptoms:**

include Urticaria (hives), Hay Fever symptoms, Rhinitis, Conjunctivitis, Breathing Difficulties and Asthma. More severe symptoms include Anaphylaxis and there have been deaths reported associated with Latex Allergy. The reaction in this type is usually immediate. Some people become sensitised over a number of years through exposure to NRL.

Management of Type 1: Avoidance is the best treatment option as there is no cure for NRL Allergies, but Medication is available to treat the symptoms once the allergy develops. It is recommended that anyone with an NRL Allergy (especially Type 1) wears a Medic-Alert Bracelet.

## 3. The Use of NRL

Disposable gloves are the most singly used device containing NRL. The Health and Safety Executive has recently stated that, "Single use disposable natural rubber latex gloves may be used where a risk assessment has identified them as necessary. Where they are to be used they must be low-protein and powder free".

There are alternatives to NRL Gloves and these include Vinyl Gloves (although these can sometimes be ill-fitting) Nitrile and Cotton Gloves. The type of glove should be matched for the task to be performed e.g. Cotton Gloves would not be suitable for dealing with Body Fluids.

Although the highest proportions of disposable gloves are used within the Healthcare Sector, they are also used in Catering and Domestic Services, Motor Industry and Hairdressing.

They are also found in First Aid Boxes.

#### **4. Products Containing NRL**

There are many items of medical equipment and consumer products that contain NRL and there are some examples below.

##### Medical Equipment – includes the following:

- Surgical Gloves and Rubber Aprons
- Oral and Nasal Airways
- Intravenous Tubes and Catheters
- Anaesthesia Masks
- Blood Pressure Cuffs
- Tourniquets

Not an extensive list but for illustrative purposes only.

##### Consumer Products

- Erasers and some pens and pencils have rubber grips round them
- Rubber Bands
- Balloons
- Hot Water Bottles
- Condoms and the Contraceptive Cap
- Stress Balls
- Baby Teats
- Sports Equipment (e.g. hand grips on rackets, swimming cap and goggles and yoga mats)
- Rubber backed carpets and door mats
- Tyres
- Shoe soles
- Some calculator pad and remote control buttons
- Some items of Computer equipment e.g. the pointer wheels on a mouse, gel wrist supports, some mouse mats etc
- Headsets – some ear pieces and mouth pieces

Again not an extensive list – there may be other products that you are aware of.

#### **5. Actions Required**

Action	Responsibility	When
1. Employees should report Latex Allergies to their Manager as soon as possible.	All Employees	As required
2. Managers will assess the Employees work role and equipment used and adaptations and substitutions made as necessary.	Service and Clinical Support Managers and Office Manager	As required
3. There may be a possible need for a referral to Occupational Health	Line Manager to seek advice from the HR Adviser	As required
4. Managers should be aware of the contents of products when purchasing new equipment and check with the Manufacturer where there may be a risk to an Employee with a Latex Allergy.	Service Support Managers and Office Manager	As required
5. Pre-employment screening will include asking potential new employees if they have a latex allergy and where a person has an existing allergy a referral may be necessary to Occupational Health for a skin and respiratory assessment to establish a baseline record.	Occupational Health	As required
6. All incidents of Latex sensitisation resulting in <u>any</u> adverse reaction should be reported to a Line Manager immediately and recorded using the Incident Recording Procedure*	Clinical and Service Support Managers and Office Manager – with advice from the Health and Safety Adviser as necessary*.	As required

\*NB Occupational Dermatitis and Asthma associated with Natural Rubber Latex in the workplace is RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) 1995 reportable to the Health and Safety Executive.

#### Review History

Issue No	Reason for review and brief description of changes made	Effective Date
1	Initial Issue	June 2012
2	Reviewed no changes made	Sept 2015
3	Reviewed no changes made	October 2018
4	Reviewed no changes made	April 2021

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