



# VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

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## Latex Allergies

Latex allergy is an allergy to proteins in natural rubber products. The range of reaction runs from minor allergies and rash to severe skin reactions, anaphylaxis and death.

Since September 30, 1998 the Food and Drug Administration has required that any device "introduced into interstate commerce" be labeled as to the presence of dry natural rubber or natural rubber latex. Latex allergy came to mind recently when a patient had an anaphylactic reaction to latex that was in a multidose vial top. What is latex?

Latex comes from rubber trees. It is composed of polyisoprene, a large variety of sugars, lipids, nucleic acids, and highly allergenic proteins. Part of the allergic potential of latex is determined by how the latex is processed. Demand for latex is huge. A portion of it is made in poorly regulated factories in tropical countries. Latex is present in a variety of medical and household products. It is so ubiquitous that 1-5% of the general population has latex allergy. 2% to 17% of health care workers are predicted to be allergic to latex. Symptoms of latex allergy have been found in 14% of EMS providers.



Although people with no identifiable risk factors may have significant allergic reactions to latex, people who are allergic to bananas, avocado, passion fruit, chestnut, kiwi fruit, melon, tomato and celery are more likely to have an allergic reaction to latex. In general, health-care workers, rubber industry workers, persons with spina bifida or urogenital anomalies, and people who have undergone prolonged surgeries or mucous membrane exposure to latex devices (especially early in life) are at greater risk.

Latex may be present in the following and other medical devices: gloves, urinary catheters, tourniquets, tape, bandages, drains, injection ports, electrode pads, rubber syringe stoppers, medication vial stoppers, stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, ambu bags, and stretcher mattresses. It is also present in many household items.

It was striking to me that after passing a needle through a rubber stopper, drawing up a medication, and getting rid of the air, there was enough latex present to almost kill somebody. More information on latex can be found at <http://www.infohiway.com/spinabifida/latex.html>.

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