

My Latex Allergy

I'll start off by giving you some history about myself, I have been an MLT for over 20 years and used one type of glove or another during all of that time....we have gone from having one type of glove in a one size fits all to a wide variety of choices in both sizes and materials used to make the gloves.

The first time I had a reaction to latex was while I was doing my EMT class and we were practicing for our practical exam. I was actually acting as the patient when my eyes began to get very itchy and watery, I no longer had gloves on and unfortunately I did scratch my eyes a lot. Next my eyes proceeded to swell and get very red, I looked like someone had beat me up...I could hardly recognize myself in the mirror. They drove me to the hospital where I received several shots and I had to stay for a while so they could observe me for a short time. When I got home I still looked pretty bad, and I was exhausted.

I really didn't think it would happen again, especially if I washed my hands more carefully after removing gloves. I thought I was allergic to the powder in the gloves not the latex in the gloves. Even though I was very careful about washing my hands, I did have another reaction and the symptoms were the same, the action we took was also the same.

The third time it happened I got itchy all over (hands, feet, eyes and body) and when I started to get ready to go to the hospital I was actually short of breath!! These three reactions happened over a period of about 9 months so it was not like a common occurrence but this last incident scared me enough to get referred to an allergy specialist. He did the skin test and confirmed that I had a very serious latex allergy along with being allergic to many pollens, dust and dogs and cats. He also did the blood tests to confirm a Class 2 latex allergy.

This meant some changes in my workplace....the laboratory. The first thing to change was the switch from latex to nitrile gloves. This was a costly but necessary change. According to the specialist all the people who worked in our laboratory had to switch to nitrile gloves so that I would not be exposed. The switch was easy and quick and soon everyone was happy with the new nitrile gloves. We have also recently switched to all latex free tourniquets, the products made without latex are getting better and better all the time. The only other change that I made was the purchase of a medic-alert bracelet that would alert people in an emergency situation to my latex allergy. If I ever need surgery I will have to give them advance notice of my allergy to allow them to prepare.

I think there will be more and more health care workers that acquire this condition while on the job and I am glad employers have recognized this allergy and adjusted workplace conditions accordingly.

Respectfully,
Mary Kratchmer