

Employee News



Anchorage School District

Please refer to the “**ASD Allergy Handbook**” for the district’s policies and procedures for responding to and accommodating allergies in ASD facilities:

www.asdk12.org/forms/uploads/ASD_Allergy_Handbook.pdf

The **U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration** recommends the following documents for information on latex allergies and prevention:

“**Latex Allergy, A Prevention Guide**” - Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Publication No. 98-113:
www.cdc.gov/niosh/98-113.html

“**Potential for Sensitization and Possible Allergic Reaction to Natural Rubber Latex Gloves and other Natural Rubber Products**” – OSHA Safety and Health Information Bulletin, Jan. 28, 2008:
www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib012808.html

“**Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex in the Workplace**” - DHHS, NIOSH Publication No. 97-135. Contains recommendations to help minimize latex allergy reactions and exposures:
www.cdc.gov/niosh/latexalt.html

For ADA inquiries contact the EEO Department, 742-4132.

All ASD facilities to become latex-reduced worksites

All Anchorage School District facilities will become latex-reduced work environments this year. Signs are being distributed to the facilities advising individuals that products such as latex balloons will no longer be allowed on the grounds.

According to Valerie Woods of the ASD Equal Employment Opportunity Office, 77 percent of the district’s schools are currently latex-reduced facilities.

“Due to the increased number of allergy cases we have seen at the schools, it makes sense to reduce latex at all our facilities,” Woods said. “Because some of our buildings were not latex-reduced environments, some of our employees who suffer from latex allergies could not attend trainings or meetings held at those worksites.”

ASD employees are encouraged to replace latex gloves with vinyl ones and to evaluate their work areas to insure as many latex products as possible are removed. Frequent cleaning, vacuuming of upholstery and dusting, can reduce the amount of latex particles in the air.

Natural rubber latex is used in many products such as carpeting, upholstery, adhesive tape and bandages, pacifiers and diapers. The protein in rubber can cause allergic reactions in some people. The thin stretchy latex rubber in products like gloves and balloons causes more allergic reactions than hard-rubber products like automobile tires.

Allergic symptoms range from mild to severe respiratory problems. Research has shown that the more exposure a person has, the more likely he or she will become latex-sensitized, according to the National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety. The institute states that about 6 percent of the general public and about 12 percent of health-care workers are allergic to latex.

For more information about the new ASD policy, go to the district Web site at www.asdk12.org or contact Safety Specialist Dave Sharrow, 742-4274.

Latex-reduced environment

Newsletter clips

What is latex and why should it be reduced in the workplace?

Source: FamilyDoctor.org

Natural rubber latex comes from the liquid in a tropical rubber tree. It can be found in such products as rubber toys, pacifiers and baby-bottle nipples, clothing, upholstery and medical and dental supplies.

The protein in rubber can cause allergic reactions in some people. They get hay fever like symptoms from either breathing in latex particles or bumps or sores on their skin from coming into physical contact with latex products.

Assessing the number of latex products in an environment can help determine which ones can be removed or replaced to reduce exposure.

Diagnosing latex allergies

Source: National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety

Latex allergy should be suspected in anyone who develops certain symptoms after latex exposure, including nasal, eye, or sinus irritation; hives; shortness of breath; coughing; wheezing; or unexplained shock. Anyone who experiences these symptoms should be evaluated by a physician, since further exposure could result in a serious allergic reaction.

Taking a complete medical history is the first step in diagnosing latex allergy. In addition, blood tests are available to detect latex antibodies. Other diagnostic tools include a glove-use test or skin tests that involve scratching or pricking the skin through a drop of liquid containing latex proteins. A positive reaction is shown by itching, swelling or redness at the test site.

Once a person becomes allergic to latex, special precautions are needed to prevent exposures during work as well as during medical or dental care. Certain medications may reduce the allergy symptoms, but latex avoidance, which is quite difficult, is the most effective approach.

Prevention of latex allergies

Source: National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety

People should take the following steps to protect themselves from latex exposure and allergy in the workplace:

- Use non-latex gloves for activities that are not likely to involve contact with infectious materials, such as food preparation, routine housekeeping and maintenance.
- Appropriate barrier protection is necessary when handling infectious materials, according to the Centers for Disease Control. If latex gloves are chosen, use powder-free gloves with reduced protein content.
- When wearing latex gloves, do not use oil-based hand lotions, which can cause glove deterioration.
- After removing latex gloves, wash hands with a mild soap and dry thoroughly.
- Use good housekeeping practices to remove latex-containing dust from the workplace.
- Frequently clean areas contaminated with latex dust, such as upholstery and carpets.
- Frequently change ventilation filters and vacuum bags used in latex-contaminated areas.