FDA Consumer
Sep 1991 v25 n7 p3(1)

Latex Allergies Affect Medical Treatment.

Patients who know they are sensitive to latex should inform health professionals and emergency personnel about their sensitivity before undergoing medical procedures, advises a recent FDA medical alert.

FDA has received an increasing number of reports of allergic reactions to latex-containing medical devices such as surgical and examination gloves, catheters, intubation tubes, and dental dams. The reactions range from skin rashes to breathing difficulties and shock.

One brand of latex-cuffed enema tips was recently recalled after several patients died as a result of anaphylactoid (severe allergic) reactions during barium enema procedures.

Proteins in the latex appear to be the cause of the reactions, and FDA is working with manufacturers of devices containing the material to keep the protein levels as low as possible.

FDA has asked physicians to:

• question patients about latex sensitivity when taking medical histories

• consider using devices with alternative materials, such as plastic, for patients who are sensitive

• always be alert to the possibility of allergic reaction when using latex-containing devices

• advise patients who experience an allergic reaction possibly due to latex that they may be sensitive to the material, and consider allergy testing for the patient.

Consumers should tell health professionals and emergency personnel about any known latex sensitivity before undergoing medical procedures. Those with a severe sensitivity may want to consider wearing an identification bracelet.

By David A. Kessler, M.D.