



Instructor Guide

Latex Allergies

Topic Overview (why the topic is important to the students)

Hairdressers who use disposable gloves may develop a reaction to either real or synthetic latex gloves. The most common reaction is **sensitivity** to either latex or synthetic gloves, causing contact dermatitis—dry, raw skin, usually after 5-6 days of exposure. People who are **allergic** to real latex can have severe reactions called anaphylaxis. The reaction can occur after just minutes of exposure and can include swelling of the eyelids and face, runny nose, coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, fast heart rate, and low blood pressure.

Cornstarch powder, often used to make gloves easier to put on, can absorb latex proteins. When the gloves are removed the powder can be released into the air and may be inhaled. There are now powder free, low allergen gloves that reduce the risk of reactions.

Demonstration and Discussion Topics

- **Discuss** the potential for latex allergy or sensitivity, the symptoms, and the problems.
- **Distribute** the student handout.
- **Review** the safety tips.
- **Explain** that low-allergen, powder free gloves are available.
- **Make it real.** Tell at least two stories of latex allergies from your experience, or use the following examples:
 - An apprentice who started wearing gloves regularly when she was learning to apply hair colouring noticed after about a week that her hands were becoming progressively dry and sore. Her dermatologist diagnosed contact dermatitis.
 - A hair stylist with a history of allergies such as strawberries and kiwi suffered an anaphylactic reaction when the salon she was working in switched from synthetic to real latex gloves. Paramedics arrived quickly and were able to resuscitate her.
- **Emphasize** the importance of identifying and reporting any concerns about latex allergies.
- **Answer** any questions or concerns they might have.
- **Set a good example** by working safely and keeping your workspace clean at all times.

Resources

- Dealing with latex allergies at work http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_and_safety/by_topic/assets/pdf/latex_allergies.pdf