

LATEX ALLERGY POSITION STATEMENT



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One of the primary responsibilities of the College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan (CDSS) is to ensure best practices, quality assurance, and continuing competence of individual registrants and improve and enhance the practice standards of the profession in general.

The objective of the CDSS Continuing Competency and Quality Assurance Program is to: ensure a minimum standard of competence; improve and enhance the collective knowledge, performance, and quality of care of all dentist registrants in Saskatchewan; and to demonstrate the commitment and dedication to serve in the public interest.

Lifelong reflection, self-assessment, self-direction, and learning is a fundamental responsibility of a professional. As an oral health care professional in a dynamic and evolving environment, it is critical to remain current and informed of changes of best practices and standards of care in dentistry and oral health care delivery.

LATEX ALLERGY: RISK MANAGEMENT AND HARM PREVENTION

Latex allergy is an immunological reaction, either cell-mediated or IgE-mediated, to certain proteins found in natural rubber latex. Repeated environmental or occupational exposure can lead to sensitization and potentially life-threatening allergic reactions. Reactions are triggered by direct touch, skin contact or mucosal surface contact, or through inhalation of airborne particles.

While latex allergy is fairly rare in the general population, the prevalence among health care workers is reported to be as high as 17%. It is also higher among individuals with other allergies, or with medical conditions, such as spina bifida, which necessitate repeated interventions or procedures. Several health regions and facilities throughout the country, including the former Saskatoon Health Region, have undertaken initiatives and developed policies and procedures to eliminate occupational exposure to latex for their employees.

Although there is no legislation or policy that regulates latex use in private health facilities and offices, an awareness of latex allergy and latex allergy disability, and an understanding of the potential consequences for both patients and staff, might lead dentists to consider using alternatives to latex. There is also an expectation that dentists should make accommodations for patients with disabilities, which in some cases might include modifications in the facility environment for latex-sensitive patients.

Pursuant to the CDSS Infection Prevention and Control Standards in the Oral Health Care Facility IPC-03-02 - Gloves section:

The use of latex gloves is not recommended.

If latex gloves are selected, powder-free gloves are recommended as the exposure to latex proteins and the chemicals used in the manufacture of all gloves is reduced.

It is recommended that dentists take steps to create latex-safe environments to minimize the risk of preventable harm to their facility personnel and their patients.

CREATING A LATEX-SAFE ENVIRONMENT

- Identify all products in the facility that contain latex.
- Replace latex-containing toys in waiting rooms.
- Post notices in the office indicating that it is a latex-safe environment and advising against introducing latex products.
- Identify patients with a known or suspected latex allergy and indicate that clearly on their charts.
- Ask patients about latex allergies at the time of booking appointments and procedures.
- Discuss latex concerns and options with patients.
- Follow up with allergic patients to determine the efficacy of the latex safety measures in the facility.
- Use latex-free and powder-free products such as gloves, supplies, and equipment in the facility or clinic. This includes rubber dam, gloves, and other personal protective equipment (PPE). (Stretchy rubber products contain the highest concentration of allergenic proteins due to the type of vulcanization process used in manufacturing them).
- Use alternative materials such as nitrile or vinyl.
- Educate staff and colleagues in the facility about latex allergy and symptoms and the appropriate response in the case of a severe latex reaction.
- Ensure that staff and colleagues report a possible latex allergy reaction regarding a patient or themselves.
- Ensure the facility has an available emergency cart which includes an anaphylaxis kit.
- Pursuant to the CDSS Infection Prevention and Control Standards in the Oral Health Care Facility IPC-02-01 – General Considerations section:
 - The Facility Manual must include the following elements:
 - Facility protocol regarding contact dermatitis and latex hypersensitivity.
- Ensure that staff and colleagues report a possible latex allergy regarding themselves.

In the health care environment, the single most important step in creating a latex-safe environment is the elimination of powdered latex medical devices. There are thousands of healthcare and consumer products that are commercially available and may potentially contain latex. It is very difficult to obtain full and accurate information on the latex content of products since products may vary between companies and product series. The primary resource for obtaining information on latex content is from the individual product manufacturers.

While it is not mandated that private facilities make such accommodations, the College recognizes that dentists are committed to the well-being of their patients and additionally have a responsibility to maintain a safe workplace for their staff. An awareness of the risks associated with latex products in the healthcare environment can help when making improvements toward achieving these objectives.

Further information about latex allergy can be found in the following resources:

<https://allergyasthma-network.org/allergies/latex-allergy/> <https://www.osha.gov/latex-allergy>

<https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/diseases/latex.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/97-135/default.html>

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The College recognizes, with thanks, the contributions of this organization to the development of this communication.