# NORTHERN NEVADA ADULT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES POLICY AND PROCEDURE

SUBJECT: EMPLOYEE HEALTH MANAGEMENT OF LATEX-SENSITIVE EMPLOYEES

NUMBER: NN-HR-19

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## I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish a standardized protocol for identification and follow-up of latex allergic or sensitive employees.

#### II. POLICY

It is the policy of Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services (NNAMHS) employee health physician to assess and evaluate employees who experience latex allergies/sensitivity and offer appropriate follow-up referrals.

#### III. PROCEDURE

- 1. Reduction or Avoidance of Latex Exposure Employees should take the following steps to protect themselves from latex exposure and allergy in the workplace:
  - a. Use non-latex gloves for activities that are not likely to involve contact with infectious materials (food preparation, routine housekeeping, maintenance, etc.).
  - Appropriate barrier protection is necessary when handling infectious materials.
     Hypoallergenic latex gloves do NOT reduce the risk of latex allergy. However, they may reduce reactions to chemical additives in the latex (allergic contact dermatitis).
  - c. Use appropriate work practices to reduce the chance of reactions to latex. When wearing latex gloves do not use oil-based hand creams or lotions that can cause glove deterioration. Avoid touching your eyes, ears, nose or mouth while wearing

latex or immediately upon removing a latex glove in order to avoid potential latex sensitization via these mucosal routes. Remove gloves promptly. After removing gloves, wash hands with a mild soap and dry thoroughly

d. Latex-free gloves are provided by NNAMHS at no charge to the employee.

### 2. Identification of Latex Sensitivity

. Employees with irritant dermatitis will be directed by their supervisor to use non-latex, low allergen, powder-free gloves. Both latex and non-latex gloves are available to NNAMHS employees. If unremitting sensitivity is noted or latex allergy is suspected, the employee will see the employee health physician. If further evaluation is necessary then it will be handled as any other exposure issue through workman's compensation.

#### 3. Education

Educational materials on latex sensitivity are available from the Employee Health nurse and the Education Department.

# 4. Products Containing Latex

A wide variety of products used in the workplace contain latex. Workers who repeatedly use latex products are at higher risk for developing sensitivities. The following are examples of products found in the workplace that may contain latex:

Anesthesia masks

**Balloons** 

Blood pressure cuffs

Carpeting

Catheters

Condoms

Dental dams

Diaphragms

Dishwashing gloves

Disposable gloves

Electrode pads

Endotracheal tubes

Erasures

Expandable fabrics (waistbands)

Gloves

Goggles

Injection ports

Intravenous Tubing

Motorcycle/Bicycle handgrips

Oral and nasal airways

Racquet handles

Respirators

Rubber bands

Rubber tops of multi-dose vials

Shoe soles

Stethoscopes

Surgical masks

Syringes

**Tourniquets** 

Wound drains

# IV. REFERENCES

NNAMHS Policy NN-IC-06 Hand Hygiene

NNAMHS Policy NN-IC-07 Standard (Universal) Precautions

# V. DEFINITIONS

- Irritant Dermatitis: This is not a latex allergy. It is caused by irritation from wearing gloves and by powder or other chemicals in gloves, not latex content. Signs and symptoms include localized redness and itching.
- 2. Allergic Contact Dermatitis (sometimes called chemical sensitivity dermatitis): Results from the chemicals added to latex during harvesting, processing, or manufacturing. These chemicals can cause a skin rash similar to that of poison ivy. Neither irritant contact dermatitis nor chemical sensitivity dermatitis is a true allergy.
- 3. True Allergic Reaction: Latex allergy is a reaction to certain proteins in latex rubber. The amount of latex exposure needed to produce sensitization or an allergic reaction is unknown. Increasing exposure to latex proteins increases the risk of developing allergic symptoms. In sensitized persons, symptoms usually begin within minutes of exposure but they can occur hours later and can be quite varied. Mild reactions to latex involve skin

redness, rash, hives, or itching. More severe reactions may involve respiratory symptoms such as runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, and asthma. Rarely, shock may occur; however, a life-threatening reaction is seldom the first sign of latex allergy.