

30

TATTOOING, LATEX AND LIFE-THREATENING ALLERGY

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Aim: To enlighten the risk of developing Type I and IV latex allergy among tattooed and tattooists.

Material

1. Case-story. Anaphylactic reaction: In 2003, a 40-year old, previously healthy male, acquired a black tattoo on his left shoulder. During tattooing, the skin was touched and rubbed numerous times by the tattooist wearing latex gloves. Subsequently, the customer experienced several allergic reactions with anaphylactic symptoms requiring hospital treatment at the intensive care unit. Swelling, papules and haemorrhagic blisters in patient's tattoo preceded anaphylactic episodes. It is plausible the patient was sensitized during tattooing.
2. Questionnaire to professional tattooists: 46 tattooists completed a questionnaire concerning problems related to usage of latex gloves.

Results: No tattooists had ever experienced anaphylaxis among their customers or colleagues. However, a customer with known latex allergy had warned his tattooist. Many tattooists reported customers experiencing nausea and fainting while undergoing tattooing, supposedly due to hunger, dehydration, nervousness, irregular breathing or fear of needles. None of the tattooists found it necessary to summon an ambulance.

Six of 46 tattooists (13%) had experienced hand dermatitis when using latex gloves and 2% were unsure whether problems were related to latex gloves. Problems mentioned were itching and redness. During the last 5-10 years many tattooists have substituted to either non-powdered latex or nitrile gloves.

Conclusion: Life-threatening anaphylaxis type I latex allergy can exceptionally be induced through tattooing and theoretically also afflict the tattooist. Type IV allergy to latex, manifested as hand eczema, is not uncommon among tattooists. Many tattooists have already replaced powdered latex gloves with non-powdered or nitrile gloves.