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# Alternative rubber gloves win U.S. FDA approval



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UNITED STATES - (Adds study details, company comment)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Doctors and nurses allergic to traditional rubber gloves could see relief from a new alternative made from a different type of latex approved by U.S. health regulators Wednesday.

The new exam gloves, made by privately-held Yulex Corp, are derived from a North American desert plant and aim to provide coverage without the skin itchiness and redness common to those who cannot tolerate regular latex.

Rubber gloves -- a staple among health-care workers to help prevent the spread of diseases -- cause reactions in anywhere from 3 percent to 22 percent of doctors, nurses and other technicians, according to the Food and Drug Administration, which approved Yulex's gloves.

The FDA said data found people with latex allergies did not have a reaction to those made from the alternative plant, the guayule bush found in the Southwestern United States.

A 2005 study by Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md. compared the two types of latex in 180 adult health care workers and 53 children and did not find detectable levels of allergenic proteins. Researchers concluded the guayule latex should be safe.

Still, like traditional rubber gloves, the new ones will also have to carry a warning about possible allergies because there have been no long-term studies on possible reactions, the FDA said.

Traditional rubber is produced using the sap of the hevea braziliensis rubber tree, but repeated or long-term exposure can trigger reactions that can also include coughing, wheezing and other breathing problems.

Yulex President and Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Martin said the company is also developing other guayule-based medical products, including catheters and thicker surgical gloves for longer wear.

"The potential in the wider market is quite significant," he told Reuters.

Although the thinner exam gloves are already approved, they are unlikely to hit the market until late 2009, Martin said. Instead, he said the company is focused on getting the surgical version to market first, citing higher demand.

The Arizona-based company has said it is investing heavily in the guayule bush, expanding operations to Australia to harvest seedlings and looking at ways to produce latex from the plant in bulk. Yulex is also exploring its use in alternative fuels and adhesives. (Reporting by Susan Heavey; Editing by Andre Grenon)

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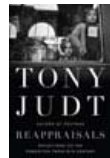
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