# Family forced to leave home due to latex allergy from playground renovation



A family in Dereham, Norfolk, has been compelled to vacate their home following severe allergic reactions experienced during renovation work on a nearby playground. Zoe Rowntree, 43, and her 16-year-old son, both of whom suffer from latex allergies, encountered difficulties breathing when contractors began removing rubber safety matting from the old play area situated approximately 200 feet from their end-of-terrace housing association residence.

The allergic reactions occurred as work commenced on March 13, resulting in respiratory distress for Mrs Rowntree and her son amidst the release of microscopic latex particles into the air. According to Mrs Rowntree, their allergic condition became critical after the airborne particles prompted symptoms of wheezing, an itchy nose, and swelling in her son’s face. "Over the following weekend, I was left wheezing with a shortness of breath, my nose streaming, itchy eyes and a tingling to my lips and tongue," she recounted.

In response to the severe symptoms, Mrs Rowntree sought medical assistance and was advised to visit the accident and emergency department at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, where she was treated with steroids. Her son managed to alleviate his symptoms with antihistamines, avoiding hospitalisation.

The Rowntree family was notified prior to the renovation that a new surface made from shredded tyres, known to contain latex, would replace the old rubber matting; a change that Mrs Rowntree had warned the council could endanger her family's health. Despite her appeals for a latex-free alternative, Dereham Town Council reportedly declined to allocate an additional £30,000 for such an option, citing budget constraints.

Describing the situation, Mrs Rowntree expressed her concerns about returning home, stating, “We will never be able to return now. The new play equipment is going to be far more popular and the play area is much bigger so there will be more people there kicking around the mulch and filling the air with latex proteins." She highlighted the potential increase in exposure, especially during hotter weather, when the mulch would become stickier and contribute to airborne latex.

Mr Rowntree, 48, a self-employed personal trainer, echoed his wife's sentiments, underscoring the risk posed by the chosen surfacing material. "The bottom line is that the council could have used a safe alternative to having a latex surface but they chose not to," he stated. He noted the prevalence of latex allergies, estimating that between one and six per cent of the UK population might be affected, with many cases remaining undiagnosed.

The family has since been relocated to temporary emergency accommodation arranged by Breckland District Council, who intervened to assist after the family's plight became apparent. Mrs Rowntree is also a carer for her two sons, both of whom have complex needs, and the family's move involved transporting most of their belongings into storage.

The refurbishment of the play area, part of a broader initiative to enhance children's facilities in Dereham, carries a budget of £125,000. Town Clerk Tony Needham commented on the council's decision to utilize rubber surfacing, explaining that it is commonly used in play areas across the country and poses no greater risk than exposure to everyday car tyres.

He expressed regret over the distress caused to the Rowntree family but maintained that comprehensive investigations revealed no justification for altering the sourcing decision. As renovation work continues, the new play area remains fenced off, and the local community anticipates its eventual opening, though concerns over allergy safety remain unaddressed.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.cdc.gov/latex/safety-latex-gloves.html> - This CDC resource provides information on latex allergies and safety, which is relevant to the severe reactions experienced by Zoe Rowntree and her son due to airborne latex particles.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/allergies/types-of-allergies/latex-allergy/> - This NHS page explains latex allergy symptoms and risks, similar to what the Rowntree family experienced during the playground renovation.
* <https://www.british-allergy.org.uk/patients/latex-allergy> - This British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology webpage discusses latex allergy prevalence and symptoms, aligning with Mr Rowntree's comments on undiagnosed cases.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/playground-surfaces-and-safety> - This UK Government guidance on playground surfaces mentions safety considerations, including the use of materials like rubber, which is relevant to the Dereham playground renovation.
* <https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/dust-and-pollen/latex-dust/> - Asthma UK provides advice on managing allergies, including those to latex-related allergens, which can exacerbate respiratory conditions like asthma.