# Family evacuated from home due to allergic reactions caused by playground renovations



A family in Dereham, Norfolk, has been compelled to evacuate their home following serious allergic reactions experienced by a mother and her teenage son due to renovations at a nearby play area. Zoe Rowntree, 43, and her 16-year-old son, who both suffer from a latex allergy, found themselves gasping for breath when contractors began tearing out old rubber safety matting from the playground located approximately 200 feet from their end-of-terrace housing association home.

The incident occurred last weekend, just before work began on installing a new surface made from shredded tyres. The family has since been provided with emergency accommodation but harbours fears that they may never be able to return due to the anticipated health risks posed by the new mulch. Mrs Rowntree stated that the local council had declined to allocate an additional £30,000 for a latex-free surface, which she claims could have prevented the situation.

Mrs Rowntree has battled a latex allergy since her teenage years, leading to severe reactions upon exposure to latex-containing items such as gloves. Over the past six years, her condition has worsened, making her sensitive to airborne latex particles. During the renovation process, she experienced symptoms such as wheezing, shortness of breath, and facial swelling. “I was left wheezing with a shortness of breath, my nose streaming, itchy eyes and a tingling to my lips and tongue,” she recalled.

Concerned for her health, Mrs Rowntree contacted medical assistance when her symptoms escalated. An operator advised her to visit the accident and emergency department at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, where she received treatment with steroids. Her son's reaction also necessitated medical attention, although he managed to avoid hospitalisation.

According to Mrs Rowntree, both she and her son had previously avoided using the play area due to the presence of rubber matting, which had remained largely untouched because the playground’s dilapidated equipment attracted few visitors. However, the disturbance caused by contractors led to the dispersion of latex particles into the air, triggering their allergies.

In an effort to safeguard her family's health, Mrs Rowntree communicated her concerns to Dereham Town Council, inquiring specifically about the materials selected for the new playground surface. However, the council confirmed that a rubber mulch would be used, which Mrs Rowntree contested would pose potential risks to her and her son.

She added that they had to vacate their home after moving most of their belongings into storage. "We will never be able to return now," she remarked, emphasising her concern that the newly installed play equipment would attract more children, thereby increasing exposure to latex proteins.

Her husband, Keith Rowntree, 48, a self-employed personal trainer, expressed frustration regarding the council's decision to use a latex-containing surface. “It has put the health of my wife and son at risk as a result," he stated, emphasising the need for alternative materials.

Local resident testimonies corroborated the Rowntrees' longstanding awareness of their allergies, with one individual recalling previous instances where Mrs Rowntree requested her son to refrain from playing with latex balloons due to potential health risks.

Tony Needham, the town clerk of Dereham, defended the decision to use rubber safety surfacing, stating that it is a widely-used product in children's play areas across the country. He indicated that the company providing the product deemed it safe, asserting that materials containing latex are commonplace in various environmental contexts. The council expressed regret for the distress experienced by the Rowntree family but maintained that they found no compelling reason to alter their choice of surfacing material.

As renovations proceed on the playground, which is part of a £125,000 initiative by Dereham Town Council to enhance play facilities in the area, the Rowntree family remains in temporary accommodation, awaiting clarity about their future and the potential health risks associated with returning home.

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

## References

* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-57456200> - This article reports on the health risks faced by individuals with latex allergies and discusses an incident similar to the one experienced by the Rowntree family in Dereham, corroborating the allergic reactions caused by renovations near their home.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/latex-allergy/> - NHS guidance on latex allergy provides information on symptoms and reactions, supporting the description of Mrs. Rowntree's severe allergic responses due to latex exposure during renovations.
* <https://www.derehamtowncouncil.org.uk/> - The official website of Dereham Town Council includes information about playground renovations and community decisions, backing the council's involvement in the choice of playground surfacing materials.
* <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/health-and-social-care/allergies-and-allergic-reactions> - This resource discusses the implications of allergies and community health policies, reinforcing concerns about the use of materials that can trigger allergic reactions as faced by the Rowntree family.
* <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/news/news-archive/2022/latex-allergy-precaution/> - This article details precautions necessary for individuals with latex allergies and addresses community health initiatives, which corresponds to the Rowntree family's advocacy for safer material choices in public spaces.