# Family evacuated due to latex allergy after playground renovation



A family in Dereham, Norfolk, has been compelled to evacuate their residence following severe allergic reactions experienced by a mother and her teenage son during renovation work on a nearby playground. Zoe Rowntree, 43, and her 16-year-old son, both of whom have a latex allergy, struggled for breath as contractors replaced rubber safety matting in the old play area directly opposite their home.

The family left their three-bedroom home last weekend, shortly before the installation of a new safety surface made from shredded tyres was set to commence. They are currently being housed in emergency accommodation, expressing fears that they may never return to their home due to potential allergens from the new mulch.

The situation escalated after Mrs Rowntree alleged that local council officials had declined to allocate an additional £30,000 for a latex-free surface option for the newly enlarged play area. She has a longstanding history with latex allergies, first developing skin reactions during her teenage years that necessitated the use of antihistamines. Over the last six years, her condition has intensified, leading to heightened sensitivity to airborne latex particles, requiring her to carry EpiPens for emergencies.

Mrs Rowntree stated that she and her son consistently avoided the old playground situated approximately 200ft from their end-of-terrace home, as they were aware of the rubber matting which posed a risk to their health. They had previously not encountered any issues with the site due to it being "old and dilapidated," with little foot traffic disturbing the matting.

However, on March 13, when work commenced to remove the old surface, the family was caught off-guard by the release of microscopic latex particles. "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," Mrs Rowntree explained. After calling NHS advice, she was advised to seek immediate medical attention at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital where she received outpatient care.

Her son experienced similar, albeit less severe symptoms, including facial swelling and breathlessness, but fortunately did not require hospitalisation. They both attempted to limit their exposure by staying indoors, but the effects of the latex particles proved too significant to avoid entirely.

Following her medical incidents, Mrs Rowntree contacted Dereham Town Council to notify them about her allergies and questioned the type of surface intended for use in the renovation. Despite her concerns, the council confirmed that a rubber mulch would be installed, leading her to escalate the issue to Breckland District Council. They subsequently arranged for the family to move into temporary accommodations as an interim solution.

Mrs Rowntree noted that the new play area, once inaugurated, is likely to attract increased foot traffic, which could further exacerbate their exposure to latex. She voiced disappointment regarding the council's unwillingness to invest in a latex-free alternative, suggesting that such a decision overlooks the inclusivity needs of individuals with allergies that are often under-recognised.

Her husband, Keith Rowntree, 48, a self-employed personal trainer, added: "The bottom line is that the council could have used a safe alternative to having a latex surface but they chose not to." He elaborated that the agitation caused by ongoing disturbances to the surface is likely to threaten their health if they were to return.

Despite Mrs Rowntree's experiences being shared, local council representatives defended their decision regarding the playground's surfacing. Tony Needham, town clerk, commented that the rubber safety surfacing chosen is widely employed in children's play areas across the country. He stated that advice from the product supplier indicated that tyres containing latex pose no greater risk compared to tyres present in the environment.

As the family navigates this challenging situation, they now face an uncertain future concerning their long-term residence and the distinction between community development initiatives and the health needs of its residents.

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

## References

* <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/latex-allergy/symptoms-causes/syc-20373439> - This URL supports the medical aspects of latex allergy discussed in the article, including symptoms like shortness of breath, wheezing, and itchy eyes.
* <https://www.epa.gov/wastewater/sustainable-materials-management-program> - This URL provides information on sustainable waste management, which can include discussions about playground surfacing materials like rubber mulch derived from tires.
* <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Playground-Safety.aspx> - This resource discusses playground safety, including the choice of surfacing materials that should ideally be safe for children and avoid hazards.
* <https://www.latexallergyresources.org/> - This website offers resources on latex allergy, including the impact of airborne latex particles and the need for safe environments.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/latex-allergy/> - This URL provides information on latex allergy from a health service perspective, corroborating the medical reactions described in the article.