# 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 an allergic reaction experienced by a mother and her teenage son during renovation work on a nearby play area. Zoe Rowntree, 43, and her 16-year-old son, both suffering from a latex allergy, encountered severe respiratory issues when contractors began the process of removing rubber safety matting from the defunct playground directly opposite their residence.

The Rowntree family, which includes Mrs Rowntree's husband Keith and their two sons, left their three-bedroom home last weekend as work commenced to replace the matting with a new surface made from shredded tyres. The family has been provided with emergency accommodation but expresses grave concerns about their potential inability to return home, primarily due to the heightened risk of latex exposure from the new play surface.

Mrs Rowntree articulated her frustrations regarding the decision-making of local council officials, who opted against allocating an additional £30,000 for a latex-free surface in the updated play area. She disclosed that she has battled a latex allergy since her teen years, detailing how her condition has intensified to include sensitivity to airborne latex particles. This increase in severity has led her to carry EpiPens routinely to mitigate the risks of anaphylactic shock.

Prior to the renovation, the family had cautiously avoided the playground, located roughly 200ft from their home, due to the presence of rubber matting which they knew could trigger allergic reactions. The safety matting was primarily untouched due to the dilapidated state of the equipment, minimising exposure risk. However, the situation changed dramatically on March 13, when site workers commenced refurbishing the area, inadvertently launching micro-particles of latex into the air.

Mrs Rowntree recounted, “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.” Following a distressing experience that compelled her to seek medical assistance, she was instructed to visit the accident and emergency department of Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, where she was treated.

Her son similarly experienced symptoms, including facial swelling and shortness of breath, albeit without the need for hospital care. The family attempted to limit their time at home during the ongoing renovation but struggled to manage their exposure effectively.

Further complicating matters, Mrs Rowntree reached out to Dereham Town Council, which is overseeing the installation of new play equipment. Despite her concerns regarding the potential use of rubber in the new surface, the council confirmed their plans to use a rubber mulch for the project, reinforcing their decision based on budget constraints.

In light of the circumstances, Breckland District Council arranged for the Rowntrees to move into temporary accommodation, necessitating the relocation of their belongings to storage. Mrs Rowntree expressed her disappointment at the situation, saying, “We will never be able to return now.”

The new play area is being developed at an investment of £125,000 as part of Dereham Town Council's initiative to enhance facilities for children in the community. However, the decision to forgo safer materials for the renovation has been met with criticism from both the Rowntree family and local residents. The Rowntrees fear that increased foot traffic and general use of the expanded playground will exacerbate their exposure to latex particles.

Town Clerk Tony Needham addressed the controversy, noting that rubber safety surfacing is commonly employed in children's play areas across the nation. He stated, “The advice from the company providing the product was that tyres containing latex are a permanent feature of the environment around roads and so the safety surfacing for the play area poses no greater risk than everyday car tyres.” Additionally, he expressed regret for the family’s distress and acknowledged the need for further diligence in such matters.

The condition of latex allergy is documented by Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, which advises that while anyone can have a latex allergy, it is particularly prevalent among individuals who have frequent exposure to latex materials.

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

## References

* <https://www.london.nhs.uk/our-services/gigu/gosh-institute-child-health/inherited-cardiovascular-diseases-service/latex-allergy> - This link provides information about latex allergy and is comparable in context to Great Ormond Street Hospital's guidance, though not directly from them. It explains that latex allergy can occur in anyone but is more common among those frequently exposed to latex.
* <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/latex-allergy/symptoms-causes/syc-20374215> - This Mayo Clinic page describes the symptoms and causes of latex allergy, aligning with Mrs Rowntree's experiences of respiratory issues and increased sensitivity over time.
* <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/planning-development-and-transport/planning-and-building-control/building-control> - While not directly addressing the specific incident, this page on Norfolk.gov provides general information on building regulations and control, which might pertain to the renovation and safety considerations in Dereham.
* <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/housing/breckland-council-housing-options> - Breckland District Council's housing options page could support the aspect of the council arranging temporary accommodation for the family, although it doesn't directly address the specific incident.
* <https://www.hse.gov.uk/rubber/latex.htm> - The UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides information on latex, including its use and the potential for allergic reactions, which could explain the risks associated with latex in playground materials.