

Appendix A

Allergies

Background

1. The immune system normally protects the body from viruses and bacteria by producing antibodies to fight them. Allergies are an overreaction of the immune system.
2. In an allergic reaction, the immune system starts fighting essentially harmless substances like dust mites, airborne pollutants, or a medication as if the substance was trying to attack the body. This overreaction causes problems that affect the skin, nose, lungs, digestive organs and the blood vessels.
3. Typically, workers will not experience an allergic reaction until they have become sensitized to the allergens in their workplace.
 - a. Some workers will become symptomatic to allergy-causing materials (allergens) when exposed only a few times.
 - b. While other workers will develop a reaction only after a prolonged period of time.
4. The following are guidelines for the adjudication of allergy claims.

Guidelines

1. Claims will be considered for acceptance if a worker is exposed to an allergen during the course of employment which causes an underlying mild allergic sensitivity to become symptomatic.
2. In the workplace, allergic reactions may be caused by a number of substances, including but not limited to, the following:
 - a. Biological agents (viruses, bacteria, fungi, pollen) that can accumulate in washrooms, humidifiers, de-humidifiers, ventilation pipes and ducts.
 - b. Volatile organic compounds that are released by felt-tip markers, correction fluid, cleaning agents, paint and toner from photocopiers, printers and fax machines.
 - c. Formaldehyde, which is found in glue, carpeting, some fabrics and furniture made from particleboard or plywood.
 - d. Latex gloves used by health care workers to prevent the transmission of infectious diseases.
3. Occupational health specialists recognize that numerous health problems may result from exposure to these substances including: inflammation of sinuses, ear problems, upper respiratory infections (wheezing, chest tightness and coughing), growths in the nose, nose bleeds from allergy symptoms or allergy medication, and, skin infections from scratching itchy skin.
4. Industries or occupations with a greater risk of workers developing allergies include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Farmers or veterinarians who become allergic to animals.
- b. Food industry workers exposed to a number of allergens including shellfish, peanuts, eggs and coffee beans.
- c. Hairdressers who become allergic to shampoos, conditioners or colourants they use daily.
- d. Physicians, nurse's aides, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, food service workers and housekeeping personnel who wear latex gloves.