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## **Food Protection Program Policies, Procedures and Guidelines**

**Issue:** Guideline on Latex Glove Use in Retail Food Establishments      **No:** RF 3-5

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommend that latex gloves NOT be used in food establishments. Latex gloves may cause severe allergic reactions in certain sensitized individuals. As stated in 105 CMR 590.004(E), **single-use natural rubber latex gloves are *not recommended* in food establishments.**

### **Symptoms of Latex Allergy**

Latex allergies can produce a variety of symptoms, including skin redness, hives, itching, runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, and asthma. While many cases are mild, in severe cases, exposure to latex may result in anaphylactic shock, a life-threatening condition. Symptoms may occur within minutes of exposure to latex or, in the case of allergic skin reactions, take up to 2 days to become evident.

### **Occurrence of Latex Allergies**

Studies done on health care workers show that because of the repeated and prolonged exposure to latex gloves approximately 10% of this population has developed sensitivities to latex. Food establishment employees, who repeatedly use latex gloves, may also be at risk of developing sensitivity to latex which could result in their becoming allergic to a wide range of latex containing products. There is a concern that if food employees continue to use latex gloves, a significant percentage may develop allergies to latex.

Consumers who are sensitized to latex can be at risk if they consume food that has been handled by workers wearing latex gloves. The allergens from the gloves can be transferred to the food, and may cause a reaction in allergic individuals. Recent reports in the scientific literature indicate that approximately 1% to 6% of the general population is sensitized to latex. Although reactions appear to be rare, sensitized people may be at risk of experiencing an allergic reaction should they eat food which has been handled with latex gloves.

### **Recommendations**

Food establishments should avoid the use of latex gloves. Good substitutes for latex gloves are available and include, vinyl, nitrile, polyvinyl, chloroprene, or polyethylene gloves, and deli tissues and tongs. As always, good handwashing practices are critical in food service operations.

## Important Points

- Latex gloves are not recommended for use in food establishments.
- Repeated use of latex gloves has been shown to increase the risk of developing allergies to latex.
- In rare instances, consumers who have latex allergies may react to food which has been handled with latex gloves
- Good alternatives to latex gloves are available and include:
  - polyvinyl
  - nitrile
  - chloroprene
  - polyethylene
- Use of gloves can be limited by using utensils and deli tissues.
- Use of gloves does not decrease the need for good handwashing practices.

## Internet Resources on Latex Allergies

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH):  
[www.cdc.gov/niosh/latexalt.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/latexalt.html). Contains the full text of NIOSH's alert on latex allergy.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)  
[http://www.osha-slc.gov/html/hot\\_3.html](http://www.osha-slc.gov/html/hot_3.html). Contains the full text of OSHA's Technical Information Bulletin on latex gloves.

### Latex Allergy Links

<http://latexallergylinks.tripod.com>. Latex Allergy Links is a comprehensive and up-to-date listing of latex allergy-related sites on the Internet. It also includes articles and practical information about latex allergy, a message board, chat room, mailing list and guestbook. The members of Elastic, Inc., bring the National Latex Allergy Network this educational networking site to you.