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Bare Hand Contact with Ready-to-Eat Foods

Ready-to-Eat Food

The 1999 Food Code defines ready-to-eat food as:

“food that is in a form that is edible without washing, cooking, or additional preparation by the food establishment or the consumer and this is reasonably expected to be consumed in that form”.

When employees touch these foods, any contamination that is on their hands is highly likely to go into a consumer’s mouth.

Preventing Contamination of Ready-to-Eat Foods

Michigan’s Food Law of 2000 identifies three key requirements to prevent contamination:

- 1) Prevent ill persons from working with food; and
- 2) Wash hands effectively; and
- 3) Prohibit bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods unless acceptable alternative practices and procedures are developed.

Bare Hand Contact with Ready-to-Eat Foods

The Food Code states in Section 3-301.11 (B):

“Except when washing fruits and vegetables as specified under section 3-

302.15 or when otherwise approved, food employees may not contact exposed, ready-to-eat food with their bare hands and shall use suitable utensils such as deli tissue, spatulas, tongs, single-use gloves, or dispensing equipment.”

Section 6151 of the Michigan Food Law of 2000 spells out very specific conditions that retailers must meet if bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods is to be allowed. No prior approval is required. However, retailers must do the following:

- 1) **Develop Written Alternative Practices and Procedures for Bare Hand Contact with Ready-To-Eat Foods,**

And

- 2) **Meet Critical Requirements of the Food Code**

The Michigan Department of Agriculture has developed “A Guide To Developing A Written Alternative Practice and Procedure For Bare-Hand Contact With Ready-To-Eat Foods” to assist interested persons in this area.

These requirements are designed to ensure that consumer safety will not be compromised if bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods occurs.

All retail food facilities should reassess their current procedures to ensure employee hands do not contaminate ready-to-eat foods. The success of your business rests in the hands of your employees!

*Note: This document is for educational purposes only and should not be considered a replacement to reading the Food Code and Michigan Food Law of 2000. Food safety information and additional copies of this and other fact sheets are available from the Michigan Department of Agriculture’s web page www.michigan.gov/mda