

Latex Allergy Alert

Food Processing Industry

Latex Gloves Can Cause Serious Allergic Reactions

Many employers in the food processing industry require their workers to wear gloves when handling & packaging food products. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) advises that exposures to latex may result in allergic reactions.

Single use natural rubber latex gloves are NOT recommended for use by workers in the food processing industry.

Why latex gloves can cause serious allergic reactions

Latex gloves can cause a variety of allergic reactions, including an irritant skin rash; hives; nose, eye, or sinus symptoms; and asthma. Workers are exposed to this risk of allergic reaction when they wear latex gloves or inhale airborne latex particles. Exposure to latex can cause a life threatening reaction in highly sensitive individuals. Even small amounts of latex allergens can cause severe allergic reactions. Individuals who wear latex gloves often, or who have allergies, hay fever, asthma or skin problems have a higher risk of developing latex allergy. Latex sensitive individuals are also at risk when they consume foods handled by workers wearing latex gloves. Therefore, latex should be regarded as an indirect food & food product contaminant.

How to protect workers and consumers from latex exposure

Eliminate latex gloves from the workplace. Adopt health and safety policy that prohibits the use of latex gloves by workers. NIOSH recommends that employers provide workers with non-latex gloves for use in industries where there is little risk of contact with infectious materials. Vinyl, nitrile, and other synthetic gloves are cost effective, and are appropriate for use in the food processing industry.

It makes good business sense to protect both workers and consumers from an allergic reaction that is so easily preventable.