

TESTIMONY RE: H.B. No. 5347
AN ACT PROHIBITING THE USE OF LATEX GLOVES IN FOOD BUSINESSES

My name is Carolyn Mirek. I serve on the Town Council in South Windsor and I have a life-threatening latex allergy. I support Proposed Bill 5347 to prevent others who have a latex allergy or who could develop latex allergy from being exposed to a known allergen without their knowledge. I am grateful for the opportunity to explain why latex-free gloves can protect both consumers and those who work in food establishments.

I was licensed in 1983 to practice dental hygiene after graduating from Northeastern University and Forsyth School for Dental Hygienists. I served as a trustee to the Connecticut Dental Hygienists' Association and was an active member of the Hartford component, later serving as President of the Hartford Dental Hygienists' Association. I have presented lectures to dental hygienists about latex allergy. In 2001 I was disabled from my career as a registered dental hygienist due to latex allergy. I also have permanent partial disability as I may inadvertently have other exposures to latex. Having to change my career was the hardest thing I ever had to do. How could I provide for my family now? My insurance denied my claim. I was forced to fight a long grueling battle culminating in a six day federal jury trial followed by a bad faith claim. First, I had to sue the glove manufacturers to prove their liability. These events were extremely stressful. I went through counseling while mourning the loss of my 18 year career as a dental hygienist. I started fresh, retrained for a career in dental sales, although I must practice strict avoidance of latex. Who knew that the latex gloves that I wore for protection while treating dental patients could cause life threatening anaphylaxis? If I enter a room or business that has latex balloons, I must leave immediately. Latex particles are invisible: I cannot see latex toxins in the air or food.

Here are a few examples of my past latex allergy reactions. In 2001, my family was having lunch at an amusement park in Connecticut. After one bite, my eye swelled shut, and I could not breathe. I saw the box of latex gloves behind the counter. Unprepared, I soon learned that the park was also unprepared- without an emergency kit, Benadryl, or EpiPens. Imagine how frightening that was for my four and six year old children! I knew I was sensitive to latex gloves, but no one ever told me that anaphylaxis could occur from latex touching my food. I had been eating latex without my knowledge, and it could kill me! According to the American Latex Association, latex gloves are dangerous in food preparation since proteins shed from the gloves onto the food. Eating food contaminated with latex proteins can cause anaphylactic shock and possible death in sensitive individuals. At my husband's company party, I ate latex contaminated baby greens and vinaigrette which caused severe nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, swelling, hives, and airway closure. A year ago, one restaurant assured me prior to and reassured three more times that they did not use latex gloves. I had anaphylaxis after one bite of food. Later, the manager admitted, "Oh yes, the chefs did use some latex gloves." In July 2014, I had my most severe reaction ever, and I thought I was going to die. I was transported by ambulance to Saint Francis Hospital.

How many people have latex allergy? The number of people with latex allergy is under reported. Diagnostic tests are unreliable and not standardized in the US. Many family physicians do not realize they need to diagnose latex allergy based on clinical symptoms rather than unreliable and expensive tests. Thus, many people don't know they have it. Many don't know they have it. I, personally, was undiagnosed for many years. When anyone today visits a medical or dental facility they are asked in their medical history if they have a latex allergy. It is common and severe! An estimated 15 million people worldwide suffer from latex allergy. According to The Spina Bifida

Foundation, experts think latex could be a problem for up to 73 percent of children and youth with Spina Bifida. There is a rise in the number of elderly- now 11%. Among the general population it is reported, but probably exceeds up to 6% while healthcare workers it is 10-17%.

Oregon, Rhode Island, Boston, and Arizona have banned latex from restaurants. A restaurant in Manchester, CT recently went latex free because one of their cooks developed latex allergy. Why are food establishments putting their workers at risk when there are several safe and inexpensive alternatives? Restaurant chains such as Subway, Chipotle, Bonefish Grill and some others made a policy not to use latex because it made economic sense and was the right thing to do. However, others have a no-latex glove and utensil policy in food prep, yet allow latex balloons which makes the environment unsafe for the people with latex allergy. I sell gloves for my dental supply company and latex gloves are more expensive now than other types. So why would anyone choose the more expensive, life-threatening kind?

If a food establishment's policy is to protect and prevent cross-contamination, then why are they using latex gloves? Latex is proven to transfer and stick to food, glasses, and plates for 24 hours. Latex protein becomes a hidden food allergen. Latex particles from gloves, rubber cooking utensils, and balloons becomes airborne and inhaled. Workers in food service are often unaware of the latex risk and the potentially deadly consequences. Many professionals wear latex gloves today that did not before-such as food service, hair stylists, day care workers, repairmen, and janitors- and they are experiencing a wave of newly developed latex allergy like health care workers experienced since the 1980's.

The food safety manual "The Safe Food Handler" states: "Provide workers with non-latex gloves because latex gloves might cause a reaction in some workers." When some states banned latex glove use in the food industry, a major impetus for this was an increase in workers compensation claims related to latex allergy. Our own CT Department of Public Health website has a section titled "Food Protection." This article provides a link to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's that since 1997: "Non-latex gloves are recommended for tasks (such as food preparation, routine housekeeping, and maintenance) that are not likely to involve contacts with infectious materials such as blood." Shouldn't the state of Connecticut abide by the CDC, especially if they list it as a reference?

Less expensive, safer alternatives to latex gloves are available. The risk of exposure to this hidden toxin being served to unsuspecting diners, as well as those preparing the food, can be minimized. Latex allergies are real and preventable. Reduce the incidence of increased latex exposure, allergic reactions, workers compensation claims, lost wages, and disability claims. Let's follow the CDC Guidelines on our State of Connecticut Food Protection website.

Thank you for your consideration, and I hope you will support HB 5347.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Streeter Mirek, RDH
48 Sele Drive South Windsor, CT
cmirek@cox.net

References:

http://www.ct.gov/dph/cwp/view.asp?a=3140&q=387486&dphNav_GID=1828

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/updates/latexpr.html>

<http://latexallergyresources.org/articles/are-there-hidden-dangers-food-prepared-latex-gloves>

<http://www.latexallergyinfo.com/latexfreerestaurants.htm>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4017681/>

[http://www.kintera.org/site/c.liKWL7PLLrF/b.2700271/k.1779/Latex Natural Rubber Allergy in Spina Bifida.htm](http://www.kintera.org/site/c.liKWL7PLLrF/b.2700271/k.1779/Latex_Natural_Rubber_Allergy_in_Spina_Bifida.htm)

http://www.foodbase.org.uk/admintools/reportdocuments/11_27_Latex_final_report.pdf

http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fda.gov%2Fohrms%2Fdockets%2Fac%2F03%2Fslides%2F3977s1_Heumann

[ppt&ei=BsvFVJGODYqZNRtCgcAH&usq=AFQjCNGGpBWF7Gj4w6zM8E1zFQuWeyl_Bg&sig2=5WkTk_cGA_siO88nNg_uKsKw&bvm=bv.84349003,d.eXY](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0Cppt&ei=BsvFVJGODYqZNRtCgcAH&usq=AFQjCNGGpBWF7Gj4w6zM8E1zFQuWeyl_Bg&sig2=5WkTk_cGA_siO88nNg_uKsKw&bvm=bv.84349003,d.eXY)

<http://latexallergyresources.org/articles/letter-us-dept-health-and-human-services>

Anaphylaxis (an-a-fi-LAK-sis)

is a serious allergic response that often involves swelling, hives, lowered blood pressure and in severe cases, shock. If anaphylactic shock isn't treated immediately, it can be fatal.

A major difference between anaphylaxis and other allergic reactions is that anaphylaxis typically involves more than one system of the body.

Symptoms usually start within 5 to 30 minutes of coming into contact with an allergen to which an individual is allergic. In some cases, however, it may take more than an hour to notice anaphylactic symptoms.

Warning signs may include:

- Red rash (usually itchy and may have welts/hives)
- Swollen throat or swollen areas of the body
- Wheezing
- Passing out
- Chest tightness
- Trouble breathing
- Hoarse voice
- Trouble swallowing
- Vomiting

Red conjunctiva

Runny nose

Swelling of lips
and/or throat

Swelling
of face
and
arms

Swelling
of

- fever
- light-headedness
- loss of consciousness
- confusion
- headache
- anxiety

Respiratory

- shortness of breath
- wheezing or stridor
- hoarseness
- pain with swallowing
- cough

Gastrointestinal

- crampy abdominal
pain
- diarrhea

