**The GLOVE Debate**

**Written by Department of Public Instruction, Food and Nutrition Services**

Is wearing gloves necessary when preparing and handling food? During the 2010 CACFP Summer Training, DPI staff learned of a wide range of glove use occurring in centers; from staff requiring glove use at all times to others believing that hand washing is sufficient. Here we will cover the different regulations on food handling so that you can decide which practice is best for your center.

The Wisconsin Licensing Rules for Group Child Care Centers requires that food preparation staff wash their hands with soap and warm running water before starting work, before and after handling food, and after using the toilet; and employees with an open or infected wound/sore must cover the wound with a nonporous glove.

Another regulatory body is the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection which issues the Wisconsin Food Code, regulation geared toward more commercial food establishment operations**,** yet nonetheless defines its purpose as being to safeguard public health and provide food that is safe, unadulterated, and honestly presented. The Food Code states that food preparers may not touch exposed, ready-to-eat food with their bare hands and shall use suitable utensils such as spatulas, tongs, or single-use gloves (one pair of gloves may not be used for multiple tasks). It further discusses the use of single-use gloves when working with ready-to-eat foods or raw animal foods, used for no other purpose, and discarded when they become damaged, soiled, or when interruptions occur in the operation.

So what should you make of all of this? On one hand licensing requires hand washing, while on the other hand the Food Code discusses not touching foods with bare hands and the use of single-use gloves. Before you make a decision for your center, let’s take this one step further to illustrate the importance of preventing cross-contamination, regardless of the method of food handling you choose:

Imagine it is lunch time and your cook is busily preparing a nutritious meal for the children in your center. On the menu are ham and cheese sandwiches, carrots sticks, and canned peas. The cook washes her hands and puts on a pair of gloves to further protect the food from any bacteria that might still be on her hands. She then proceeds to prepare the meal: taking the ham, cheese and carrots sticks out of the refrigerator, and getting canned peas from a cabinet, opening with a manual can-opener and pouring into a pot. While the peas are warming up she lays slices of bread out on a cutting board and carefully places layers of ham and cheese in-between two slices. She then cuts the sandwiches in half and sets them on individual plates. Next she grabs a handful of carrots to go along side each sandwich, and then spoons peas onto the plate as well.

Sound like a healthy lunch? Think again.

While the cook meant well by washing her hands and putting on gloves, she completely cross-contaminated the food by touching non-food objects and then touching the ready-to-eat food. Among things the cook did incorrectly were touching the refrigerator door handle to get the ham, cheese and carrots, touching cabinet doors, canned goods, can openers and pots and THEN touching the ready-to-eat food items bread, ham and cheese slices, and carrots. The cook cross-contaminated the food with any bacteria transferred to her gloves from the refrigerator door, cabinets, cans, kitchen utensils and pots, which are all surfaces where bacteria are lurking. This same scenario occurs with bare-hand food preparation.

With all of this said, regardless of which food handling method you choose ensure that your food preparers are not cross-contaminating food, their hands or gloves by touching multiple surfaces before and during food preparation. When a surface other than ready-to-eat food or raw animal food is touched, or when switching between handling both types of food products, hands should be re-washed or gloves should be changed before touching food again. These same considerations apply to food servers, i.e. teachers and helpers who might be serving food to children in the classroom or cafeteria.