

TO: Lincoln-Lancaster County Board of Health

FROM: Scott E. Holmes, REHS, MS, Manager, Environmental Public Health Division
Justin L. Daniel, REHS, CP-FS, Environmental Health Supervisor, Food Safety Program

DATE: February 26, 2016

RE: Amending Lincoln Municipal Code 8.20 Lincoln Food Code by adopting a new section
“Preventing Contamination from Hands”

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department is proposing to update the Lincoln Food Code to add a new section on Preventing Contamination from Hands. The intent of this change is to improve public health protection by reducing the incidence of foodborne illnesses due to norovirus and other organisms that can be spread from contaminated hands to food. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, norovirus is the leading cause of foodborne illness in the United States. Norovirus is estimated to be responsible for about one-half of all foodborne illnesses. Contamination from hands is the leading cause of norovirus outbreaks from food.

In December 2014, the Food Advisory Committee (FAC) approved a working group to evaluate the no bare hand contact policy and to define a protocol for establishing when and how it should be enforced. Members of the working group consisted of several FAC members, other representatives of the food industry, academia, and other interested parties. The working group met four times and proposed a new code to the full FAC, which approved it in December 2015.

In January 2016, all owners of licensed food establishments and Food Managers were mailed the proposed Food Code section and invited to provide feedback by attending one of two meetings, email, or phone. In February, 2016 two public meetings were held, which attracted 41 attendees, who were a diverse mix of food establishment owners and Food Managers. LLCHD presented a brief history of how the code was developed and went over the proposed code. Feedback was encouraged and good discussion occurred at both meetings. Questions were asked about the code, mostly focusing on how it would be implemented. No one stated any opposition to the proposed code.

The proposed new Lincoln Food Code section is based on the 2013 FDA Food Code, with some modifications. This new Lincoln Food Code section would be more strict than the provisions found in the Nebraska Food Code on handwashing (Neb. Rev. Stat. §81-2,272.10 Food employees; hand washing; food contact; restrictions). In essence, the standard for preventing food from being contaminated by hands would change from “minimizing bare hand contact” to “no bare hand contact” with ready-to-eat foods unless additional protective actions/policies are implemented. Three specific exceptions would be allowed: touching ready-to-eat food before cooking; garnishing beverages; and washing fruits and vegetables.

<p>Staff recommend approval of the new Lincoln Food Code section on Preventing Contamination from Hands.</p>
