Calif. Says 'No' to Use of Gloves, Utensils in Restaurants

The Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The gloves are coming off in California kitchens.

Gov. Jerry Brown announced Saturday that he signed AB 2130, which repeals a state regulation requiring restaurant employees to use gloves or utensils to handle food going straight to diners' plates.

The no-hands bill was passed last year and would have taken effect July 1. It was intended to prevent disease transmission and covered everything from sushi rice to the mint in a mojito.

Forty-one other states have similar prohibitions, and the California law drew no opposition from chain restaurants.

But some independent chefs and bartenders complained that it would restrict their hands-on craft, disrupt hand-washing routines and generate unnecessary waste of disposable gloves.

Assemblyman Richard Pan, D-Sacramento, authored the original law and also sponsored the repeal measure.

Pan, who is chairman of the health committee and a pediatrician, said he wanted to revisit the no-hands prohibition but make it more flexible to meet the concerns of restaurateurs.

"It's not about whether you wear gloves or not," Pan said in an interview earlier in the week with The Associated Press. "It's about how clean the surfaces (touching food) are. We need to have the conversation go back to, 'This is about food safety.'"

Elsewhere in the U.S., Louisiana, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Oregon, South Carolina and Wyoming encourage minimal contact but do not ban bare-hand contact outright. Tennessee is implementing its ban next year.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that workers touching food provided the most common transmission pathway for food-originated norovirus outbreaks between 2001 and 2008, the most recent comprehensive review of data available.

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