

# Inspection Report Item 9: No Bare Hand Contact with Ready To Eat Foods

FDA Food Code References: 3-301.11,

## Background

Although hand washing is critical for food safety, recent studies indicate that hand washing alone is not enough to prevent foodborne illnesses. The main reason for not touching ready-to-eat foods with bare hands is to prevent viruses and bacteria, which are present in your body, from contaminating the food. Viruses and bacteria are not visible to the naked eye, but may be present on your hands if you do not wash them thoroughly, particularly after using the bathroom. The State of Iowa prohibits bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods and requires good hand washing by food service workers.

## How can we prevent contamination from being passed through the food we prepare or serve?

You can minimize contamination being passed to your customers by washing your hands, being very careful not to cross-contaminate food, not contacting ready-to-eat foods with bare hands, and by maintaining a high level of personal hygiene. Simply being aware of the potential dangers, and attempting to minimize them is a very large step in the right direction.

## What kinds of foods are considered ready-to-eat and may not be touched with bare hands?

- prepared fresh fruits and vegetables served raw
- cold meats and sandwiches
- any food that will not be thoroughly cooked or reheated after it is prepared
- ice
- salads and salad ingredients
- shredded cheese
- garnishes such as lettuce, parsley, lemon wedges, potato chips or pickles fruit or vegetables for mixed drinks during preparation activities
- bread, toast, rolls and baked goods

**How can I prepare or serve ready-to-eat food while avoiding contact with my bare hands?** You may use any of the following utensils to prepare or serve foods without bare hand contact:

• Tongs	• Wax Paper/Deli Paper
• Forks & Spoons	• Scoops
• Spatulas	• Gloves
• Pre-Package items before service	• Divide tasks between two workers

## When am I required to wash my hands?

- Before putting on single-use gloves for working with food, and between removing soiled gloves and putting on clean gloves.
- When switching between working with raw foods of animal origin and working with ready-to-eat foods.
- During food preparation as often as necessary to remove soil and contamination and to prevent cross-contamination when changing tasks.
- After handling soiled equipment or utensils..

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### **Am I required to wear disposable sanitary gloves?**

No. The regulation does not require gloves to be worn, but does require that ready-to-eat foods be prepared and served without bare hand contact. Wearing disposable sanitary gloves is one of several acceptable ways to comply with the regulation. Remember that gloves are just an extension of your hands. If the gloves become soiled, they can pass contamination just as easily as unclean hands.

### **When do I have to replace or change gloves?**

Always change gloves if the gloves are ripped, torn, or contaminated. Contamination can occur after using the toilet room, smoking, coughing, sneezing, and preparing raw foods. You should always remove your gloves before you leave your station, and then wash your hands. Food worker hands must be washed and dried thoroughly before putting on new gloves.

### **What is the "right way" to change gloves?**

Remove and throw away the old gloves. Thoroughly wash and dry your hands. Put on a clean fresh pair of gloves without touching anything else.

### **Is a short order cook required to wear gloves?**

The short order cook may not touch ready-to-eat foods with bare hands. Disposable gloves are one possible way to prevent bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods. Another way is to use utensils such as forks, tongs, spatulas, or splitting tasks between more than one individual where possible.

### **What should I do with a ready-to-eat food item if it was touched with bare hands?**

You can either heat the food thoroughly to the temperature required for cooking or reheating, or discard the food, if it was touched with bare hands.

### **Are there concerns about use of gloves and latex allergy?**

Food establishment employees who repeatedly use latex gloves may be at risk of developing sensitivity to latex. Allergens from the gloves could be transferred to the food, and may cause a reaction in allergic individuals. Good substitutes for latex gloves are available and include vinyl, nitrile, polyvinyl, chloroprene, or polyethylene gloves, deli tissues and tongs.

### **Where can I learn more about hand washing and bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods?**

Your local health department can answer questions or give you more information about hand washing, bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, and additional important information on preventing foodborne illnesses.

**For visual demonstration see video:**

Preventing Contamination From Hands <https://ia.foodprotectiontaskforce.com/videos/>