

Preventing Bare Hand Contact with Ready-To-Eat Foods

[Chapter 246-215-03300 Washington Administrative Code](#)

What is the main reason for not touching ready-to-eat foods with bare hands? The main reason is to prevent disease-causing viruses and bacteria that may be in or on your body from contaminating food you touch. Viruses and bacteria are invisible to the naked eye, but may be present on your hands (and exposed arms), particularly if you do not effectively wash your hands after using the toilet.

What are “ready-to-eat” foods? Any food in an already edible form, that will not be thoroughly cooked or reheated to at least 145°F before being served to the customer. For example:

- Prepared fresh fruits and vegetables served raw;
- Cold salads;
- Cold meats and sandwiches;
- Bread, toast, rolls, chips, popcorn, and baked goods;
- Garnishes such as parsley, oranges, lemon wedges, pickles, salt;
- Fruit, vegetables, or other garnishes used for mixed drinks;
- French-fries, tater tots, potato wedges, etc.;
- Ingredients in a pre-prepared meal that the customer will cook at their home;
- Ice served to customers.

Methods for preventing bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food:

- Utensils – Such as tongs, spatulas, and spoons;
- Deli tissue, waxed paper, cocktail skewers, aluminum foil or napkins;
- Disposable gloves.

What happens if gloves, deli tissue, or utensils are not available? You cannot touch the ready-to-eat food without these barriers; report this problem to the person in charge.

Washing hands or using hand sanitizer does not permit bare hand contact.

- Sometimes food employees may not effectively wash their hands, leaving behind disease-causing bacteria and viruses.
- Hand sanitizers are not effective in killing all disease-causing organisms, which can make your customers sick.
- Washing hands vigorously for 20 seconds *combined* with using barriers like tongs, papers and gloves on ready-to-eat food is the most effective method for protecting your customers.

Do I still have to wash my hands if I wear gloves? Absolutely! Hands must always be washed before putting on gloves. Foodborne illness is best prevented by washing hands for 20 seconds and using a physical barrier.



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When do I have to change my gloves? Always change gloves after they have become contaminated. A good guideline to follow is when you change tasks, you will need to change your gloves. Before handling ready-to-eat foods, remember to:

- Wash your hands properly.
- Put on a new pair of gloves.
- Replace gloves as needed, especially after taking a break.
- Wash your hands every time you change gloves if the glove change is due to them becoming contaminated.
- Gloves must be replaced each time you handle raw meat, or complete a task that would otherwise contaminate your hands, such as taking out the trash, handling money, or handling soiled equipment, utensils, or linens.

Are there circumstances where bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food is permitted? Only under specific circumstances that have been reviewed and approved by the Health District in advance. For more information, contact Kitsap Public Health District at 360-728-2235 and ask for the food inspector of the day.