

# CAPE MAY COUNTY DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

4 Moore Road  
Cape May Court House, N.J. 08210-1601  
(609)465-1209 after hours (609) 465-1190  
Fax: (609) 465-6564

## **Bare Hand Contact with Ready-to-Eat Foods Questions and Answers**

### **Why is preventing bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods necessary?**

The main reason for not touching ready-to-eat foods with bare hands is to prevent viruses and bacteria which are present in the body from contaminating the food. These microorganisms are invisible to the naked eye but may be present on hands if you do not wash them thoroughly, particularly after using the bathroom. Therefore, NJ law prohibits bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods and requires proper hand washing by food service workers.

### **What is a ready-to-eat food?**

A ready-to-eat food is a food that will not be thoroughly cooked or reheated after it is prepared. Examples of ready-to-eat foods include: salads, baked goods, sandwiches, lunchmeat, etc. Some ready-to-eat foods that are often overlooked are toast, pizza slices and drink garnishes. None of these foods may be handled with bare hands.

### **Am I required to wear disposable gloves all the time?**

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. Disposable gloves are one of several acceptable ways to comply with the regulation.

### **How can I prepare or serve ready-to-eat food to avoid contact with my bare hands?**

You may use any of the following to prepare or serve foods without bare hand contact:  Disposable gloves

- Tongs
- Deli paper
- Forks & Spoons
- Waxed paper
- Napkins
- Spatulas

### **What is proper hand washing?**

All employees involved with food preparation must wash their hands and exposed portions of their arms with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Proper procedure includes rinsing the hands and portion of arms with clean, running water followed by 10 seconds of vigorous lather with soap. After rinsing the hands completely, hands must be dried with either paper towels or a hand-drying device. Cloth towels are not permitted for drying hands. Hand sanitizers may be used after hand washing, but not in place of it.

### **When am I required to wash my hands?**

- After touching bare human body parts other than clean hands and clean, exposed portions of arms;
- After using the toilet room;

- After caring for or handling service animals or aquatic animals;
- After coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief or disposable tissue, using tobacco, eating, or drinking;
- After handling soiled equipment or utensils;
- During food preparation, as often as is necessary to remove soil and contamination and to prevent cross contamination when changing tasks;
- When switching between working with raw food and working with ready-to-eat food;
- Before donning gloves for working with foods; and
- After engaging in other activities that contaminate the hands.

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

Single-use gloves shall be used for only one task, such as working with ready-to-eat food or with raw animal food. Gloves must be discarded when they become damaged or soiled, or when interruptions occur in the operation. Hands must be washed and dried before putting on new gloves.

### **What is the “right way” to change gloves?**

Grasp glove at the cuff and peel them off inside out over your fingers. Avoid touching your palms and fingers with the glove. Throw gloves away after removal. Never reuse gloves. Thoroughly wash and dry your hands. Put on a clean pair of fresh gloves without touching anything else.

### **What about individuals who are allergic to latex?**

If you are concerned that your employees or customers may have latex allergies, there are many substitutes to latex gloves. These include vinyl, nitrile, polyvinyl, chloroprene or polyethylene gloves and deli tissue or utensils.

### **How can ready-to-eat foods be prepared during grill operations?**

One method is to wear a glove on the hand that is used to prepare ready-to-eat ingredients, leaving the other hand uncovered for placing raw ingredients on the grill. Another option is to designate an employee for handling only raw ingredients at the grill, while another employee wears gloves to handle the ready-to-eat ingredients, (i.e. bread, sandwich toppings.)

### **The following are examples of violations that have been observed by this department:**

- Employee leaves kitchen without removing gloves, smokes a cigarette outside and then resumes food preparation with the same pair of gloves. **In this situation, hands must be washed and a new pair of gloves must be donned before returning to food preparation to prevent contamination. This same procedure also applies to the handling of money. Once money is handled, gloves are considered to be contaminated and must be thrown away.**
- Employee working at the grill is observed to be wearing gloves. Employee places a raw hamburger patty on grill with his/her hand and then touches hamburger bun and toppings (lettuce, tomato, etc.) **This is known as cross-contamination. The employee is transferring harmful bacteria, which are naturally present on raw animal foods, from the meat to the ready-to-eat items. Since the bun and toppings will not be cooked to kill the bacteria, the customer may become ill after eating these foods.**
- Employee working at deli counter is wearing gloves while preparing ready-to-eat foods. The supervisor asks employee to leave the counter and clean the glass of the windows at the front of the store. Employee keeps the gloves on while cleaning and then returns to the deli and continues making sandwiches with the same gloves worn while cleaning. **This employee is potentially contaminating the food being prepared with the cleaning chemicals. Remember that gloves are just an extension of your hand. If the gloves become soiled, they can pass contamination just as easily as unclean hands.**
- Employee is observed making a hoagie with bare hands. **Since hoagies are ready-to-eat, gloves must be worn by the employee. The use of gloves paired with proper hand washing will minimize the risk of the hoagie becoming contaminated by the handler.**