

## **Bare Hand Contact with Ready-to-Eat Foods**

### **Questions and Answers**

Although hand washing is critical for food safety, recent studies indicate that hand washing alone is not enough to prevent foodborne illnesses. 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 WI Food Code prohibits bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods.

#### **How can we prevent food from being contaminated?**

The combination of proper handwashing, eliminating bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods and enacting an effective employee health policy is the best strategy to prevent contamination from hands to food.

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

- Before starting to work with food, utensils, or equipment.
- During food preparation and as often as necessary to remove contamination.
- After using the restroom. Wash hands in the restroom and again in the kitchen before returning to work.
- When switching between raw foods and ready-to-eat foods.
- After coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief or disposable tissue, using tobacco, eating, or drinking
- Before putting on gloves for working with food.
- When switching tasks between food service and non food activities (ex. cleaning).
- After eating or following a break.

#### **What is good hand washing?**

Effective handwashing is vital in producing safe food. To properly wash hands:

- Wet hands under running water
- With soap rub hands together for at least 15 seconds
- Rinse under running water
- Dry hands with single-service disposable towels, heated air device or air-knife system
- Hand sanitizers are NOT be used in place of hand washing

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

Any food that that is will be consumed without additional preparation or cooking.

Examples include:

- Salad and salad ingredients
- Fruit or vegetables served raw
- Cold meats and sandwiches
- Chips – potato, tortilla
- Baked goods – breads, rolls, toast
- Ice
- Garnishes – lettuce, pickles, parsley
- Sliced or shredded cheese

### **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
- Forks and spoons
- Deli paper
- Disposable gloves
- Waxed paper
- Scoops
- Spatulas

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

No. The WI Food Code 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 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 restroom, smoking, coughing, sneezing, and preparing raw foods. You should always remove your gloves before you leave your station, and then wash your hands before putting on new gloves.

### **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.