

REDUCING CONSUMABLES IN FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS: How to prevent bare hand contact while reducing waste

KNOW THE CODE

**WAC 246-215-03300(2):
Preventing contamination
from hands—**

Except when washing fruits and vegetables as specified under 03318 or as specified in subsection (4) of this section, FOOD EMPLOYEES may not contact exposed, READY-TO-EAT FOOD with their bare hands and shall use suitable UTENSILS such as deli tissue, spatulas, tongs, SINGLE-USE gloves, or dispensing EQUIPMENT.

WAC 246-215-03300(4):
FOOD EMPLOYEES not serving a HIGHLY SUSCEPTIBLE POPULATION may contact exposed, READY-TO-EAT FOOD with their bare hands if:
(a) The PERMIT HOLDER obtains prior approval from the REGULATORY AUTHORITY...



**Need more information?
You can contact:**

[Local health department](#)

or

Washington State
Department of Health
Food Safety Program
360-236-3330

food.safety@doh.wa.gov

Food workers are key food safety partners trusted to prevent the spread of germs from food, equipment, and people—including customers, coworkers, and themselves. In addition to routine food safety tasks, three critical factors help reduce foodborne illnesses spread by food workers:

1. **Exclude** sick food workers from the establishment
2. **Wash** hands thoroughly at correct times
3. **Eliminate** direct bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food

This document focuses on the third critical factor. It identifies when barriers to prevent bare hand contact are required to protect customers and also encourages workers to use a sustainable, reusable tool or procedure change to help reduce waste.

DO YOU NEED A BARRIER? REVIEW FOOD HANDLING TASKS

Review food handling, preparation, and service steps to ensure food is protected. Ask the following questions to determine if a barrier to hand contact is needed:

- Are you actually touching unpackaged food?** Food service gloves should only be used to keep germs from getting on food and not for emptying garbage cans or other routine janitorial tasks. Wash hands or use reusable gloves, such as neoprene gloves, for personal protection.
- Is the food ready-to-eat (RTE)?** Raw food that will be cooked or produce that will be washed is not ready-to-eat. Handwashing works here.
- Can you change the procedure?** Purchase foods ready-to-eat or use gloved hands to prepare foods (such as slicing lemon wedges) in bulk and serve with reusable utensils as needed throughout the day.
- Can you use a tool?** A glove is not needed when a reusable utensil such as a scoop, tongs, or fork is properly used. While utensils can be washed and reused, gloves must be discarded after use.
- A bandage or cut on your hand?** Use a glove over bandages and open cuts.
- Do you have an approved bare hand contact plan?** Food establishments with strong active managerial control and enhanced food worker health and hygiene requirements may apply to the health department to have workers directly handle ready-to-eat food.

Task	Barrier Required?	Comment
Touch nonRTE Food	No	Wash hands first.
Touch RTE Food	Yes*	Use a utensil if possible!
Cooking	Maybe	Most steps can use tools.
Wash Dishes	No	Use rubber gloves if wanted.
Janitorial/Garbage	No	Wash hands afterward.
Chemicals/Hazards	Maybe	Wear work gloves suitable for safety.

**Establishments with an approved health and hygiene plan may handle RTE food with bare hands. Contact your local health department for more information.*

BARRIERS TO BARE HAND CONTACT: YOU DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO USE GLOVES

There are many options available to prevent direct hand contact with food:

- Deli papers may be used for baked good selection.
- Tongs are ideal for intermittent food dispensing.
- Disposable food service gloves may be used for repetitive direct contact of ready-to-eat food.

Review food handling tasks and change the procedures where possible:

- Provide suitable reusable utensils.
- Encourage staff input toward innovative approaches.
- Train staff to help reduce waste while still protecting customers.



Barrier Type	Description
Procedure Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch it up. Try to find a way to change the procedure to prepare the food without direct hand contact.
Utensil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide tongs, scoops, forks, spatulas, deli papers, and other utensils instead of gloves to prevent bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods.
Polyethylene Gloves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polyethylene gloves are loose fitting, easy to take on and off, and inexpensive. • Good for light duty tasks. • These gloves are latex-free and not typically used in medicine.
Vinyl Gloves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vinyl gloves fit tighter than poly gloves and are also relatively inexpensive. • These gloves are latex-free and not typically used in medicine.
Nitrile Gloves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allergen-free, latex-free, and powder-free available. • Durable, comfortable, and tight fitting, but more expensive than poly and vinyl. • Nitrile gloves are used in medicine and may be in limited supply during glove shortages.
Latex Gloves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latex gloves may cause allergic reactions in employees or customers. • Latex gloves are not recommended for use in foodservice due to allergy concerns and the need in the medical community.
Work Gloves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-useable work gloves such as Neoprene, cloth, etc. are not designed for direct food contact but may be used for handling chemicals, garbage, and other non-food contact activities.

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