



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

Hand Washing & Glove Use for Food Workers - Questions and Answers

These general guidelines for applying the *Rules and Regulations Governing Retail Food Establishments in the State of Colorado* are provided by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Consumer Protection Division. Additional information about the rules and regulations may be obtained by calling 303-692-3620, or visiting the Division's web page - www.cdphe.state.co.us/cp

Background

Although thorough handwashing is critical for food safety, recent studies indicate that handwashing alone is not enough to prevent foodborne illnesses. Those studies indicate that a food handler infected with Norovirus will still have an infective dose of viral particles remaining on his/her hands even after a thorough hand washing. Therefore, it is very important to reduce bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat (RTE) foods, since these foods will not be cooked, washed or have any additional protective preparation barrier prior to being eaten by your customers. Consequently, the safety of a RTE food is controlled by the person or persons who prepare and handle that food before it is served.

The *Colorado Retail Food Establishment Rules and Regulations* prohibits bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods. §3-301 states:

*3-301 Preventing Contamination from Hands

- A. Food shall be prepared with minimal manual contact. This can be achieved by the use of suitable utensils, such as deli tissues, spatulas, tongs, or single-use gloves. **Employees shall not contact ready-to-eat foods with their bare hands when it is determined by the Department that no bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food is necessary to control pathogenic microorganisms that are transmissible by food.**
- B. If used, single-use gloves shall be used for only one task, such as working with ready-to-eat food, or with raw animal food. Single-use gloves shall be used for no other purpose, and discarded when damaged, soiled, when interruptions occur in the operation, or when the task is completed.

When am I required to wash my hands?

- When returning to the kitchen after using the toilet room
- After coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief or disposable tissue, using tobacco, eating, or drinking
- When switching between working with raw foods of animal origin and working with ready-to-eat foods
- After touching bare human body parts other than clean hands and clean, exposed portions of arms
- During food preparation, as often as necessary to remove soil and contamination and to prevent cross-contamination when changing tasks
- Before donning single-use gloves for working with food, and between removing soiled gloves and putting on clean gloves
- After handling soiled equipment or utensils
- After caring for or handling any animals
- After engaging in any activities that contaminate the hands
- After handling fish in aquariums, shellfish, or crustacea in display tanks

What is good hand washing?

All employees involved with food preparation must wash their hands and exposed portions of their arms with soap and water. Thorough hand washing is done by vigorously rubbing together the surfaces of lathered hands and arms for at least 20 seconds followed by a thorough rinse with clean water. Use a

single-service towel or hot air dryer to dry hands. No special soaps, such as antibacterial soap, are needed. Hand sanitizers may be used following appropriate handwashing, but not in place of handwashing.

Am I required to wear disposable sanitary gloves?

State law does not require gloves to be worn, but does require that ready-to-eat food be prepared and served without bare hand contact. Wearing disposable sanitary gloves is one of several acceptable ways to comply with this law.

How can I prepare or serve ready-to-eat food to avoid 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

What kinds of foods may not be touched with bare hands?

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

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.

Must I change my gloves after touching money with gloves on?

No. Food outbreak investigations have not identified the handling of money as a cause of illness. But it is a good idea to change your gloves and wash your hands between touching money and preparing food. Many patrons complain to the local health department if they see food workers using the same gloves to prepare food and handle money.

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 or spatulas or splitting tasks between more than one individual where possible.

When do I have to replace or change gloves?

Always change gloves if the gloves get ripped, torn, or contaminated. Contamination can occur after using the bathroom, smoking, coughing, sneezing, and in between preparing raw and cooked foods. Food worker hands must be washed and dried thoroughly before donning new gloves.

Where can I learn more about hand washing and glove use?

Your local health department can answer your questions or give you more information about hand washing and glove use and about the importance of minimizing manual contact in preventing illnesses.