



Lincoln-Lancaster County
Health Department

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

What is the main reason for washing hands and not touching ready-to-eat food with bare hands?

The main reason for not touching ready-to-eat foods with bare hands is to prevent viruses and bacteria which are present in your body from contaminating the food. Viruses and bacteria are invisible to the naked eye, but may be present on your hands if you do not wash them thoroughly. The City of Lincoln Food Code (LMC 8.20) prohibits bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods and requires good hand washing by food service workers.

When am I required to wash my hands?

- before starting work;
- before putting on single service gloves;
- after touching raw, fresh or frozen beef, poultry, fish or meat;
- after mopping, sweeping, removing garbage or using the telephone;
- after using the bathroom;
- after smoking, eating, sneezing or drinking;
- after touching anything that might result in contamination of hands.

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 (Take 20!) followed by a thorough rinse with clean water. Use a single-service towel or hot air dryer to dry hands.

Am I required to wear disposable sanitary gloves?

The City of Lincoln Food Code 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 code.

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:

- tongs;
- forks & spoons;
- deli paper;
- disposable gloves;
- waxed paper;
- napkins;
- 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;
- bread, toast, rolls and baked goods;
- garnishes such as lettuce, parsley, lemon wedges, potato chips or pickles on plates;
- ice served to the customer;
- any food that will not be thoroughly cooked or reheated after it is prepared.

What can 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.

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 thoroughly and be cleaned before wearing new gloves.

Are there any exceptions where Food Employees can touch ready-to-eat foods with their bare hands?

Yes. Food employees not serving a highly susceptible population may contact exposed, ready-to eat-food with their bare hands if the permit holder obtains prior approval from the Health Director and abides by the City of Lincoln Food Code 8.20 Section 8.20.070 Preventing Contamination from Hands.