

Bare Hand Contact with Ready-to-Eat Food

Frequently Asked Questions

Background

Food employees shall clean their hands and exposed portions of their arms immediately before engaging in food preparation including working with exposed food, clean equipment and utensils, unwrapped single-service and single use articles, after touching bare human body parts, using the toilet room, caring for or handling service animals, coughing, sneezing, using a disposable tissue, using tobacco, eating or drinking, handling soiled equipment or utensils, during food preparation as often as necessary to remove soil and contamination and to prevent cross-contamination when changing tasks, when switching between working with raw food and ready-to-eat food, before donning gloves to work with food, and any other activities that may contaminate hands.

Can food service workers contact ready-to-eat food with their bare hands?

The North Dakota Food Code prohibits food service workers from contacting ready-to-eat (RTE) foods with their bare hands. Food service workers must wear gloves or use utensils as a separation between their bare hands and RTE food. Furthermore, proper handwashing by food service workers is required between job tasks and when gloves are changed.

How can we prevent contamination from being passed through the food we prepare or serve?

You can minimize contamination from being passed to your customers by washing your hands, being very careful not to cross-contaminate food, not contacting ready-to-eat foods with bare hands, and maintaining a high level of personal hygiene. Simply being aware of the potential dangers and attempting to minimize them is a step in the right direction.

What kinds of food are considered ready-to-eat and may not be touched with bare hands?

- Prepared fresh fruits and vegetables served raw.
- Cold deli meats and sandwiches.
- Any food that will not be thoroughly cooked or reheated after it is prepared.
- Bread, buns, toast, rolls, potato chips, and baked goods.
- Cheese.
- Garnishes for dishes such as lettuce, parsley, lemon wedges, and pickles.
- Garnishes for mixed drinks such as fruits or vegetables.
- Ice.
- Salads and salad ingredients.



What kinds of food are not considered ready-to-eat and can be touched with bare hands?

Bare hand contact is allowed for foods that will be cooked, such as pizza toppings, raw meats, and ingredients for recipes handled before cooking. However, using bare hands should be minimized whenever possible.

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.
- Waxed paper.
- Forks and spoons.
- Deli paper.
- Disposable gloves.
- Scoops.
- Spatula.



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.

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