



METROPOLITAN HEALTH DISTRICT

Food and Environmental Services 210-207-0135

BARE HAND CONTACT OF READY-TO-EAT FOODS

What is Bare Hand Contact?

Bare Hand Contact is handling of ready-to-eat foods without any barriers such as gloves or utensils between the employees' hands and the food items. "Ready-to-eat food" means food that is in a form that is edible without additional preparation to achieve food safety. Ready-to-eat foods are not allowed to be handled using bare hand contact unless proper documentation and procedures have prior approval by Metro Health.

Why Does Bare Hand Contact require approval from the Health Department?

"In November 1999, the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF) concluded that bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods can contribute to the transmission of foodborne illness." (FDA Food Code 2017, page 417).

"The three interdependent critical factors in reducing foodborne illness transmitted through the fecal-oral route, identified by the NACMCF, include exclusion/restriction of ill food workers; proper handwashing; and no bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods. Each of these factors is inadequate when utilized independently and may not be effective. However, when all three factors are combined and utilized properly, the transmission of fecal-oral pathogens can be controlled." (FDA Food Code 2017, page 417).

What are Examples of Ready-to-Eat Foods?

The definition of a ready-to-eat food is: "Food that is edible without additional preparation to achieve FOOD safety" (FDA Food Code 2017, 1-201.10 (B) Definitions)

Examples:

- Cooked or prepared foods
- Raw or partially cooked foods such as sushi and oysters
- Fruits and vegetables that have been washed
- Baked goods such as tortillas and bread
- Spices and seasonings

How can Ready-to-Eat foods be handled properly?

Ready-to-eat foods can be handled using a barrier, such as:

- Deli tissue
- Single-use gloves
- Spatulas
- Dispensing equipment.
- Tongs

What establishments are NOT allowed to practice bare hand contact procedures:

Establishments that serve highly susceptible populations are NOT allowed to handle foods with bare hands, which include:

- Health care facilities
- Assisted living facilities
- Childcare facilities

