

Bare Hands vs. Gloves

Poor personal hygiene and direct hand contact have been linked to many foodborne outbreaks. Wearing gloves can be an additional strategy to prevent the transfer of pathogenic organisms from hands to food products.

Many experts believe that proper handwashing is sufficient protection against contamination. They say that mandatory glove use can lead to a false sense of security due to the fact that gloves are commonly misused. If gloves are worn for long periods of time without being changed or they are carelessly used to pick up contaminated materials or touch body parts, they will not be effective barriers.



However, others have argued that gloves provide an additional barrier that is needed because employees may not be washing their hands often enough or correctly. Therefore, any measures to minimize hand contact with food will reduce the chances of food contamination and foodborne illness from occurring.

A side benefit of requiring employees to wear gloves is that inspectors, customers, and other visitors are visually assured that control measures are being taken to protect food from personal contamination.

Problems with Gloves

If an employee touches a surface that is contaminated with human pathogens and then touches food or a cleaned and sanitized food contact surface, it makes no difference if they wear gloves or not. A vinyl or latex glove that is incorrectly used is just as hazardous as wearing no gloves at all. It is more important that employees are trained to understand practices that can lead to cross contamination and proper use of gloves.

The warm humid conditions inside gloves provide ideal conditions for growth of microorganisms on the hands. Research has shown that many gloves have pinholes that can provide a way for pathogens on the hands to leak out and contaminate the food.



Gloves can also become torn or punctured thus exposing the hands to the product. For this reason, hands should be properly washed and sanitized before and after using gloves. Damaged gloves are also a

potential physical hazard if pieces fall into the product. Avoid this from happening by providing gloves that fit properly and have employees change them frequently.

Another problem with gloves is that some individuals may be allergic to the materials used to manufacture them. If a worker shows signs of sensitivity to gloves, such as especially if they are made from latex, managers should provide gloves that are made from non allergenic materials.

Recommendation:

Gloves can be an effective way to protect foods and food contact surfaces from becoming contaminated with microorganisms on the hands. However, a combination of handwashing and proper glove use is essential for maximum effectiveness. The following are recommendations for the use of gloves in food processing establishments.

- Employees should be fitted with the proper size and type of glove to prevent excessive stress and possible damage to them while working
- Gloves should never be taken into restrooms, lunchrooms, or other unclean areas
- Employees should clean and sanitize their hands each time they put on a new pair of gloves.
- Never reuse a glove. Discard gloves immediately after use.
- Change gloves at least every 4 hours with continuous use or
 - after they have become torn or punctured
 - after they have become visibly soiled
 - after handling unclean materials
 - after eating or smoking
 - after using the restroom
 - before starting on another duty or moving to a new production line
 - before handling any ready-to-eat foods.