



Food Code Implementation Guidance from the  
Washington State Department of Health  
Division of Environmental Health  
Food Safety Program

# Fingernails and Jewelry



## Food Code

### References:

2-302.11  
2-303.11

### Definition:

### Food Employee:

An individual working with unpackaged food, food equipment or utensils, or food-contact surfaces.



## FOOD CODE REQUIREMENT

The Food Code contains the following requirements for FOOD EMPLOYEES regarding fingernails and jewelry:

### Fingernails

- FOOD EMPLOYEES must keep their fingernails trimmed, filed, and maintained so the edges and surfaces are cleanable and not rough.
- Unless wearing intact gloves in good repair, FOOD EMPLOYEES may not wear fingernail polish or artificial nails while preparing food.

### Jewelry

- FOOD EMPLOYEES may not wear jewelry on their arms or hands while preparing food, unless the jewelry is a wedding or engagement ring covered by a glove in good repair.

## CLARIFICATION:

### Is a watch considered jewelry?

Yes. A watch must be removed when preparing food.

### What is “preparing food?”

For the purposes of this section, “preparing food” means the active handling of exposed food such as during washing, cutting, mixing, assembling and cooking.

The following activities would not be considered “preparing food”:

- Serving or plating foods with tongs or other utensils
- Checking or bagging grocery items
- Making beverages

### What if a FOOD EMPLOYEE has a piece of jewelry that cannot be removed?

Most situations will have acceptable alternatives that will protect public health. For example, medical information bracelets may be secured high on the arm during food preparation so that potential contamination is reduced and effective handwashing is facilitated while providing medical information if needed.

If an alternative cannot be found and the jewelry cannot be easily removed from the hand or lower arm area, it must be covered by a food service glove or clothing.

### What is the hazard from jewelry or fingernails?

Adornments on the hand or lower arm may harbor contaminants, may be difficult to clean thoroughly, and may prevent effective handwashing. In addition to the potential for spreading disease, they may also become a physical hazard in the food.

NOTE: This fact sheet is a compilation of major food safety rules regarding the given topic and is not designed to replace reading the Food Code.