

## Guidelines for Product Samples

Many businesses would like to provide samples of their food to customers to entice them to purchase their products. Samples are often provided at events, farmers markets or at grocery stores. This is allowed and can be done, however samples can be easily mishandled and/or contaminated if good food safety techniques are not followed. This document will provide some guidance on supplying safe food samples to your customers. This is not an all inclusive list of potential sampling situations and is intended as guidance only. Samples are regulated under PA Food Code, Chapter 46.

The Department has chosen to not determine licensing needs solely based on offering samples to consumers; however, county/local health departments may view offering food samples to consumers differently. If you are located in a local health department you should contact them directly to discuss food sampling.

During the inspection of your facility, the Department will review your handling of samples to assure that it is accomplished in a safe manner. If your samples are single servings of non-potentially hazardous foods, this is a much lower risk than samples of potentially hazardous food (PHF) products. However, even non-potentially hazardous foods can be contaminated and make a customer's ill. Care must be taken with all types of food samples.

1. Samples must be maintained under temperature control if the nature of the food requires this. PHF food samples must be maintained at 41°F or below at all times. Hot food samples must be maintained above 135°F.
2. Cooked foods must be cooked fully to their required final cook temperature. A thermometer shall be used to verify cook temperatures.
3. Any samples containing undercooked or raw animal foods, such as rare beef or sushi, must have a consumer advisory provided at the point of sampling.
4. Food samples must be protected from contamination at all times. Food samples not served immediately to a consumer via their request may not sit out on an open, unprotected plate, serving dish, cup, or

similar. All food samples, both PHF and non-PHF, out for consumer self service must be protected from consumers and sources of environmental contamination. Lids, covers, wrapping, containers and similar can be used to accomplish this. Samples under the control of an employee for service via a request to sample must also be protected from sources of contamination.

5. Samples for self service that are not individually packaged must have proper utensils for use by consumers. Tongs, toothpicks and similar can be used. Consumer hands should not come in contact with food samples other than their own sample.
6. There should be an employee assigned to monitor and watch over samples that are out for consumer self service. If a consumer contaminates samples, they must be discarded.
7. In the location where food samples are prepared or food handling is occurring (cut, diced, placed into cups, and similar) the facility must have access to appropriate handwashing facilities.
  - a. Handwashing must be convenient and accessible to the food handling/preparation/service area
  - b. Bathroom sinks may not be used as food handler handwashing sinks
  - c. Potable water must be used
  - d. Water must be maintained at or above 100°F
  - e. Soap and paper towels(or hand drying devices) must be provided at the handwash station
  - f. The handwashing station must have signage to remind food handlers to wash their hands.
  - g. Hand sanitizer may not be used in place of handwashing
  - h. Glove use may not be used in lieu of handwashing
  - i. In some temporary event situations, temporary handwashing stations may be used. This should be evaluated and discussed with your Sanitarian.
8. In the location where food samples are prepared or food handling is occurring (cut, diced, placed into cups, and similar) the facility must have access to warewashing. Cutting boards, knives, scoops, bowls and alike must be washed, rinsed and sanitized as required.
  - a. All equipment must be washing, rinsed and sanitized in a designated warewashing sink

- b. The warewashing sink need not be located in the immediate area of the food preparation area, but must be on the premise of the food facility and available for use at all times
  - c. Sanitizers must be used at their proper concentrations. Test strips must be available to test sanitizer strength.
  - d. Potable water must be used
  - e. Water must be at or above 110°F
  - f. In some temporary event situations, temporary warewashing stations may be used. This should be evaluated and discussed with your Sanitarian.
9. An alternative to preparing samples on site is to prepare them in your approved, inspected facility, and bring them to the market or event pre-packaged or pre-wrapped. This would preclude the need for warewashing facilities on site; but not handwashing in most cases.
10. If non-PHF, pre-packaged food samples are on display for customer self service, handwashing sinks would not be required unless some other activity in the facility warrants needing these sinks. Sanitizing hand wipes should always to be available to employees even with pre-packaged non-PHF food samples.

**Always consult with your Sanitarian if you have any food safety questions regarding providing safe food samples to your customers.**

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