



Proper Personal Preparation for the Florida 4-H Food Challenge Competition

This publication is a supplement to the Florida 4-H Food Challenge guides. Its purpose is to mimic the current food industry standards regarding proper personal hygiene and food preparation. This guide also includes a helpful checklist.

Personal Health and Cleanliness

Food handlers with good health and a high standard of cleanliness are likely to produce sanitary foods. To help 4-H youth prevent cross-contamination from the human body into the foods they will prepare, the following sections highlight key points from the latest industry standards (FDA, 2022).

Health Status

If you or your team members are sick, those affected should not participate in a food preparation event until clear of all the following symptoms: vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice, and/or sore throat with fever.

Proper Personal Attire/Preparation

- Food handlers must wear clean clothing appropriate for the competition and must change when it becomes soiled with food or bodily fluids. Do not wear anything with long hanging sleeves or ruffles that could contaminate food.
- Aprons, if used, must be clean. They must be removed and stored appropriately (hung up or placed in a designated area) when leaving food preparation areas (e.g., going to the restroom). Additionally, they should not be used to wipe hands.
- Fingernails must be clean, trimmed, and smooth. Artificial nails and polish are not allowed unless gloves are worn. If the artificial nails are too long for gloves to fit appropriately, the child cannot participate.

- Hair must be clean and groomed before reporting to the food preparation area.
- Long hair should be tied back before applying restraint.
- Facial hair (beards, mustaches) should be groomed and covered.
- While the FDA Food Code does not specify footwear, the Florida 4-H Food Challenge does require closed-toe, non-slip shoes that are clean and provide protection.
- Only plain rings are allowed (e.g., wedding band). All other pieces of jewelry on the hands and arms (e.g., watches, bracelets) are prohibited to prevent the harboring of pathogens and promote effective handwashing.
- Any visible wound must be covered by impermeable bandaging. Gloves do not replace bandaging.
- To prevent cross-contamination, personal electronic devices (i.e., cell phones, smartwatches, tablets, etc.) should not be used or stored in food preparation, storage, or service areas.

Acceptable Hair Restraints

- A hairnet, cap, hat, or bandana must effectively cover and restrain hair.
- Restraint must fully cover all scalp hair to prevent hair from contacting exposed foods and other items.
- Hair restraints must be clean and in good condition (i.e., no holes, tears, or loose threads).
- A beard cover should be worn if facial hair is present.

When and Where to Use Hair Restraints

- Food preparation areas
- Anytime you are working with food
- While cleaning dishes or working around food equipment

Keeping Things Clean

- Wash or replace dirty hairnets or hats.
- Keep personal items like brushes out of food areas.
- Do not touch your hair while working with food.

Food Handler Essential Attire and Hygiene Checklist

1. Clean clothing: Wear clean clothes suitable for the activity.
2. Hair restraint: Use hats, hairnets, bandanas, or caps to keep hair restrained. Use beard covers for facial hair.
3. Jewelry: Only plain bands are allowed. Do not wear any bracelets, watches, or rings with stones.
4. Fingernails: Keep nails short, clean, and unpolished. Do not wear artificial nails unless properly fitted gloves are used.
5. Gloves: Wear single-use gloves over clean hands. Change gloves between tasks or when damaged.
6. Aprons: Wear clean aprons and remove them when leaving food areas.
7. Footwear: Wear clean, closed-toe, non-slip shoes.
8. Cuts/wounds: Cover wounds with a waterproof bandage and glove. Report infection to the appropriate adult (Extension agent, team captain, or parent).
9. Personal devices: Do not keep phones, smartwatches, or earbuds in food areas.

Reference

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). (2022). *Food code*. <https://www.fda.gov/food/retail-food-protection/fda-food-code>