



Personal Protective Equipment

## Food Manufacturing: How to Choose the Right Gloves

Kellie Escoto | Sep 03, 2024

Gloves are important for more than the safety of workers in food manufacturing. The PPE is also vital to protect consumers down the line. With so much at stake, here are some tips for selecting the right glove for the job at hand.

One of the most essential ingredients of food production, processing and packaging isn't edible. **Personal protective equipment (PPE)** keeps workers safe from sharp tools, raw food contaminants and extreme temperatures. PPE also protects consumers from foodborne illnesses that cause food poisoning, such as salmonella and norovirus.

"The purpose of PPE in any industry is to ensure the user's safety as well as limit possible exposure to contaminants," says Jason Beddigs, national account manager for SHOWA.

### Food Manufacturing: Who Covers the Cost of PPE?

**Employers are responsible** for identifying the hazards at their worksites and, by and large, for purchasing the personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees to wear to guard against those hazards. But there are some instances where employers are not required to provide PPE. Here's a quick guide:

**Employer is responsible for:** gloves, aprons, nonprescription safety glasses, metatarsal guards and hairnets

**Employee is responsible for:** prescription safety glasses and steel-toe boots, if the employer permits them to be used outside of the work environment

Regardless of who is responsible for providing the PPE, it is up to the employer to ensure that the equipment is safely designed and properly maintained and sanitized.

But with a variety of food industry jobs, and the risks that come with those jobs, protecting employees and consumers is a complex task. Read on for tips on choosing gloves that provide safety and comfort.

## Choose Materials for the Hazards at Your Workplace

Food manufacturing workers face exposure to many safety risks, from the knives and tools they use to bacteria on the uncooked meat they handle. Make sure the gloves you provide for your workers will protect against the specific risks at your facility.

**Cuts and punctures:** For people working with knives and other sharp tools, choose gloves with *inlaid or woven fibers or hardy coatings*, or a combination of both, to protect hands from cuts, abrasions and punctures.

**Contaminants:** When working with food, bacteria can easily transfer from hands to food and back, putting both factory workers and consumers at risk for illness. Wearing food-safe gloves can mitigate the risk of cross-contamination. Either clean and sanitize gloves between uses or use disposable gloves that can be replaced frequently.

**Cold or hot temperatures:** People working in cold environments—particularly in meat processing and packing plants that must stay cold to prevent bacteria growth—should use gloves that are lined with a fine insulated material to provide warmth without sacrificing dexterity. The same goes for working in hot temperatures: Gloves made from Kevlar—a lightweight synthetic fiber—can protect hands from heat.

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**Chemicals:** Workers in food manufacturing environments often come into contact with oils, acids, solvents and cleaners that can be harsh on skin and also can damage some glove materials. Pick a chemical-resistant glove—coated with nitrile or latex, for example—and consider one with a safety cuff to protect the wrist and forearm from splashes.

## Layer Multiple Gloves for Maximum Protection

Given the diverse range of tasks being performed across food manufacturing facilities, there may be no single glove that protects against every hazard. To offer sufficient protection, the solution may be to layer multiple gloves.

“The application will always dictate what is needed,” Beddigs says. “Food processing roles, such as slaughterhouse, chicken deboning and meat processing, will certainly require not only a single-use disposable glove but a cut-resistant glove as well.”

***Read more: Food Safety PPE: A Guide to PPE Selection in Food Manufacturing***

Food manufacturing workers should start by wearing a glove that protects against contaminants in the food and prevents cross-contamination of germs or bacteria. Then they should layer additional gloves

as needed for the hazards of their specific jobs—some gloves may offer combined protection. Advances in technology have led to finer materials, so you won't sacrifice dexterity even when layering gloves.

## Look for FDA-Approved Materials

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) maintains *standards for safe practices in the food industry*. Regulations call for food handlers to use gloves and other PPE made from food-safe materials that don't leach into food.

Gloves bearing an FDA approval seal indicate they are safe for direct use with food. Many approved food handling gloves are made of latex or nitrile. Products that are not certified for food handling—such as medical-grade gloves or those intended for other manufacturing industries—might seem OK on the surface but could contain permeable materials and therefore are noncompliant.

## Select Comfortable Gloves

Food manufacturing workers spend hours wearing gloves during their shifts. If they are wearing a pair that is too tight or too loose or that is made of stiff fabric that limits movement, workers are less likely to keep them on. This not only puts workers at risk of injury or illness, but it also places employers at risk of FDA and *Occupational Safety and Health Administration violations*.

"People are always looking for something that offers not only safety, but comfort and dexterity," Beddigs says. "They want to wear something that doesn't hinder their job performance."

By selecting gloves with a comfortable fit and the safety features required for the work at hand, manufacturers can protect their employees, consumers and their own businesses.

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