

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Prevention Practices for Food Banks and Food Pantries

(Updated 4/24/2020)

Things to do now:

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently recommend preventative steps to reduce the risk of getting and spreading any viral respiratory infections.

- Implement the recommendations listed below, as applicable.
 - Check in with your local health department since they may have additional recommendations based on what is going on in your specific area.
<https://www.naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory?searchType=standard&lhd-search=&lhd-state=PA>
- Develop procedures that support the recommendations.
- Understand potential supply chain and resource issues.

Current requirements and recommendations:

- **As of Sunday, April 19, 2020, all employees, volunteers, and customer at essential businesses in Pennsylvania (including food banks, pantries, and other food assistance agencies) are required to wear a mask.**
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least **60% alcohol**.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you are feeling ill, stay at home and away from others.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands. Do **not** cough into your hands. If a tissue isn't available, be sure to cough only into your elbow.
- Practice and reorganize your space to promote "social distancing" (at least 6 feet of distance between people)
- Encourage cleaning of frequently used objects such as counters, shared pens, volunteer check-in stations, handles on carts (if using grocery carts), bathroom door handles, and door knobs/handles.
- Some food pantries are sanitizing hourly or more frequently, please contact your local health department if you have questions about best practices in sanitizing your space.
- If you are using a bleach cleaning agent, do not mix it with ammonia.

Additional recommendations:

- Let all of your clients know about any new procedures. Email those you can.
- Post notices in areas clients visit.
- **Request that sick clients stay home and let them know how to receive food. For example, let them know of any proxy system that allows a friend or neighbor to pick up their food packages.**

- Consider alternate delivery systems, such as drive-through distribution where clients pull up in their cars and volunteers deliver a prepackaged bag to their car. Or, consider distributing prepackaged bags at the food program door.
- If you have sanitizer available, ask clients to use it as soon as they come into the food pantry.
- If possible, request clients wash or sanitize their hands before selecting their food, or wear disposable gloves if available.
- Pre-bag produce so people do not touch produce in self-select model pantries.
- Consider keeping the amount of food on display low and restock more frequently to reduce the amount of food touched by different clients.
- Instead of making food available for clients to browse, consider a menu-only option with volunteers taking orders from clients and packing bags for them.
- Limit the number of people in food pantry space to encourage social distancing. To reduce congestion, consider extending your hours or open for an additional day.
- If your program has an appointment system, admit fewer people for each appointment and add additional appointment times.
- Increase home delivery, if possible.
- Temporarily postpone any food demos or cooking classes and don't offer food samples.
- Remove or limit access to chairs, papers (i.e. books, brochures, magazines, and recipes), bathrooms, and other things made available to clients or regularly found in client wait areas.

Supply Chain and Resource Considerations:

- Prepare and plan for operations with a reduced workforce. Anticipate a larger reduction in senior volunteers.
- Identify essential positions and people required to sustain necessary functions and operations. Cross-train or develop ways to function in absence of these positions.
- Plan for downsizing services but also anticipate scenarios which may require a surge in your services. For example, pre-packing food boxes for use in your agencies' distributions, or using mobile pantries to distribute in areas where food pantries are not open due to insufficient staffing/volunteers.
- **USDA Foods being offered through TEFAP and CSFP are continuing to come into the state in large quantities. If your food bank receives direct shipments of these products, be aware that these deliveries will continue and staff must be available to accept them.**

Additional Resources:

- Pennsylvania Department of Health:
<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Contact Information:
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Food Assistance
1-800-468-2433
RA-Fooddist@pa.gov