

COVID-19 Food Handling Guidelines for Food Pantries, and Non-profit Food Distribution Sites

Updated 4.8.2020

COVID-19 is spread from person to person. The virus mainly spreads through respiratory (breath) droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is primarily spread between people who are in close contact with one another (within 6 feet). It can also be spread by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest); however, there is evidence of spread even before people show symptoms. This is why social distancing, washing hands, and staying home while sick is important.

Older adults (age 60 and up) and people with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, heart conditions, and lung conditions, are at greater risk of becoming very sick if they get COVID-19. We need your help in stopping the spread of COVID-19!

Guidelines for Non-profit and Food Pantry Staff and Volunteers

Volunteers and staff preparing foods should follow all safe food handling guidelines (see *General Food Safety Guidelines* section). **They should not handle food if they show any signs of illness or they do not feel well.**

Do not allow staff or volunteers with symptoms of COVID-19 to come in to work or to volunteer at your site. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Make sure that your meal preparers, servers, and participants have access to a hand washing station and wash hands frequently. Ensure staff and volunteers **wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. They should then dry their hands with a paper towel and throw the paper towel away.**

At minimum, require all staff and volunteers to wash hands:

- before entering and exiting the facility
- after contact with members of the public
- following all transactions that require the exchange of cash or electronic payments
- after any pick-up, drop-off, or delivery to distribution sites

In addition, provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for participants receiving pre-packaged food and for staff and volunteers handling take-out and delivery service.

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Require frequent cleaning of all surfaces that staff, volunteers, and participants touch, including doorknobs, counters, and other surfaces.

Require frequent cleaning of all delivery vehicles.

Require everyone at your site to practice **social/physical distancing (standing or sitting at least 6 feet apart)** from other people, including in kitchen, prep, and delivery areas.

Require all staff and volunteers to wear a cloth face mask per Centers for Disease Control new guidance. Guidance and instructions on how to make a mask is available through the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>.

Temporary Screening Process at Food Pantries and Non-profit Food Distribution Sites

During the COVID-19 crisis, follow this screening process before allowing staff, volunteers, participants, and others to enter your site.

Designate a screener at the entry point to your food pantry or food distribution site. The screener(s) should wear a surgical/cloth mask. The screener(s) should ask the following questions of each person (staff/volunteer/participant) to determine whether it is safe for the individual to enter your food distribution site or food pantry:

For infection control purposes, I need to ask you a few questions:	
Have you had any of the following symptoms in the last seven days: fever or chills, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, or any other flu-like symptoms?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
In the past week, do you know if you have been in close (less than 6 feet), prolonged contact (more than 2-3 minutes) with someone with fever, cough, shortness of breath, flu-like symptoms, or a diagnosis of COVID-19?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

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If a staff member or volunteer answers YES to either question (or your organization's director has reason to believe that this person is a health risk):

- Ask the person to go home for their own safety and the safety of others. Explain that they may return to service when their health care provider clears them to work. Y

NOTE: If a staff member or volunteer starts having symptoms at your site, please give them a mask and SEND THEM HOME IMMEDIATELY. Have them seek medical care.

If a participant answers YES to either question (or your organizations director has reason to believe that this person is a health risk):

- Explain that you cannot allow the participant to come into your site by direction of the Baltimore City Health Department, but that you will help them find another option for getting food.
- Call your director (or someone appointed by the director) to explain the options to the participant for getting food other than entering your site. Other options might include:
 - Bring a boxed meal to the person at a separate area away from the site and the entrance. The worker bringing the meal should stay 6 feet away from the person receiving the meal.
 - Encourage the person to contact another service that can provide home delivery. The person may call 211 for information.

Distributing Meals at Your Pantry/Distribution Site

If distributing on site:

- Stagger the entry of participants seeking food. Do not allow more than 9 people in your site at a time.
- Have your employees and volunteers watch participants and remind them to stay at least 6 feet apart from one another while at your site.
- Mark the line every 6 feet with duct tape or cones or other marking. Ask participants to stand at those markers as they wait.

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- Provide hand washing stations or sanitizer for the participants to use at the entry point to your pantry/distribution site.
- Have participants pick up their boxed meal(s) from a designated table. Clean and sanitize the table often.

If delivering meals to homes:

- Instruct staff or volunteers to leave meals outside a person's door. DO NOT enter a person's home.
- Do not allow any members of the public to board delivery trucks or enter vehicles.
- Equip all trucks and vehicles with hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, and tissues or paper towels.
- Instruct drivers and volunteers to use hand sanitizer, tissues, and paper towels before and after each delivery and/or pick-up.
- Require frequent cleaning and sanitation of delivery trucks or other vehicles.
- Require frequent cleaning and sanitation of containers used to transport or deliver foods including carts, dollies, and other commonly used items.

Place hot and cold foods in a cooler or insulated bag to maintain proper temperatures. Make sure to maintain the foods at the proper temperatures before placing in coolers or insulated bags.

- Hot food must stay above 135°F
- Cold foods must stay below 41°F

If drive through or take-out meal distribution:

- Stagger distribution so that large groups of people do not gather together.
- Have staff, volunteers, and participants keep 6 feet away from each other while giving out, waiting for, and getting meals. Use markers as described above.

Don't Forget These General Food Safety Guidelines

- You must make sure foods are kept cold/hot, thoroughly cooked, and reheated at proper temperature levels:
 - Keep COLD food at 41°F or below
 - Keep HOT food at 135°F or above
 - Cook REHEATED food to 165°F or above
 - Poultry cooked to 165°F for 15 seconds
 - Beef cooked to 155°F for 15 seconds
 - Pork cooked to 155°F for 15 seconds

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- Eggs, fish, seafood, vegetables and any other food products cooked to 145°F for 15 seconds
- Food handlers must use proper food handling procedures at all times
 - Protect all food from contamination at all times
 - Keep all raw meats/seafood separated from cooked food
 - Follow proper handwashing procedures: **Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use paper towel for drying and throw away paper towel after drying your hands.**
- Get all your food and drink (including water) from approved sources
 - Keep all uncovered food at least 18 inches above the ground.
 - Keep all covered food at least 6 inches above the ground to avoid contamination.
 - Use a sneeze guard (wrapped, covered) for all food at all times.
- Maintain insect and rodent control.
- Employees must practice good hygienic procedures.
 - Keep your clothes clean.
 - Do not touch food with your bare hands.
 - Use utensils, tongs, or plastic gloves whenever handling food. Clean these utensils often.
 - Never handle food with dirty hands. Always wash hands after using the toilet, smoking, eating, before handling food and whenever soiled.
 - Do not eat or drink while handling foods.
 - Wear hair restraints (hats, hairnets, etc.).

For further guidance, please review the Code of Maryland Regulations, Title 10, Subtitle 15, (COMAR 10.15.03) and Baltimore Health Code, Title 6

***For up-to-date information on COVID-19,
Please check Baltimore City Health Department's website often:
<https://health.baltimorecity.gov/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>***