

## COVID – 19 INFORMATION FOR FOOD PANTRIES, FOOD BANKS AND FOOD PROGRAMS

**Current closures in Maryland will have no impact to essential services, including Food Banks, Food Pantries and Feeding Programs. Food Banks play a critical role in helping to ensure the health and safety of a community!**

The Maryland Department of Health (DOH), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) currently recommend preventative steps to reduce the risk of getting and spreading any viral respiratory infections. Check in with your local health department since they may have additional recommendations based on what is going on in your specific area. Right now, you can:

- Implement the recommendations listed below, as applicable.
- Develop procedures that support the recommendations.
- Understand potential supply chain and resource issues.
- Know who to contact.



### **Who to Contact:**

If you have questions about how to deliver services or have resource needs please:

- Contact your regular points of contact at the Food Bank
- Contact your regular government liaisons
- Contact your local health department
- Contact your local emergency manager

## Updates from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

### What steps do I need to take to clean the facility/equipment to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

FDA-regulated food manufacturers are required to follow Current Good Manufacturing Practices (CGMPs) and many have [food safety plans](#) that include a hazards analysis and risk-based preventive controls. CGMPs and food safety plans have requirements for maintaining clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces.

- Food facilities are required to use EPA-registered “sanitizer” products in their cleaning and sanitizing practices.
- In addition, there is a list of EPA-registered “disinfectant” products for COVID-19 on the [Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 list](#) that have qualified under EPA’s [emerging viral pathogen program](#) for use against SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.
- **IMPORTANT:** Check the product label guidelines for if and where these disinfectant products are safe and recommended for use in food manufacturing areas or food establishments.
- We encourage coordination with local health officials for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside.
- Food facilities may want to consider a more frequent cleaning schedule.

### Is the U.S. food supply safe?

- Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19.
- Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that causes respiratory illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission.
- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. This includes between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. However, it’s always critical to follow the 4 key steps of food safety—clean, separate, cook, and chill – to prevent foodborne illness.

## Current recommendations:

- 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 your unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you are feeling ill, or are caring for someone who is 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 tissue isn't available, be sure to cough only into your elbow shirt sleeve.
- Practice and reorganize your space to promote “social distancing” (at least 6 feet of distance between people).
- Encourage cleaning and sanitizing of frequently used objects such as counters, shared pens, tools, utensils, 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. A link to the list of EPA approved sanitizers is at the end of this document.
- If you are using a bleach cleaning agent, do not mix it with ammonia as it will produce a toxic gas.

## Additional Recommendations:

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

- 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.
- If you already offer home delivery, increase home delivery, if possible.
- If you are delivering foods, ensure foods are maintained at proper hot and cold temperatures.
- Use appropriate coolers with ice packs to keep foods cold.
- Use insulated bags or coolers designated for hot foods to keep foods hot.
- 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.
- If necessary, request a waiver from your contractor to alter your client intake process. Temporary exemptions may be available to allow clients to view and verbally verify the information is correct. Staff cannot sign on behalf of a client, but staff or volunteers can print the clients name in the signature section. Before choosing to implement any changes, you should ensure the changes won't create compliance issues with other streams of funding your food pantry might receive.

## Resources:

- Visit the [Maryland Department of Health](#) website for the latest DOH guidance and information.
- Visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus/](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/) for additional information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Visit [EPA](#) for a list of approved sanitizers.
- Visit [FDA](#) for additional frequently asked questions about coronavirus and food.
- Visit [USDA](#) for a volunteers guide to food safety "Cooking for Groups."

## Resource and Supply Considerations:

- Maintain a list of all volunteers who have worked by shift and their contact information. Consider cohorting work crews.
- 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 subcontractors' distribution, or using mobile food banks to distribute in areas where food pantries are not open due to insufficient staffing/volunteers.
- If you have any changes to your regular services, please inform your regular points of contact. Please also contact Maryland 2-1-1.
- USDA commodities are continuing to come into the state in large quantities.
- While some organizations are experiencing decreases in donations, please know that we are all working to increase food from other resources and maintain normal operations.
- Coordinate resources with other local organizations and hunger relief agencies.

## Consider Best Practices:

- Preventative measures to reduce the spread of the virus, such as increased cleaning of your facility, directing sick staff or volunteers or those caring for someone who is ill to stay home, and social distancing.
- Protective measures for vulnerable populations, such as home delivery to seniors.
- Alternate business operations that maintain client access to food, such as drive-thru distributions, longer hours, or scheduled appointment times.
- Reduction of fear, barriers, and stigma. This virus is not at all connected with race, ethnicity or nationality and we should continue to ensure equal access to services for all clients.
- A reminder that food banks and meal programs may be one of the few places where interactions with clients (especially senior clients) are conducted on a regular basis,

and that it's important to keep an eye out for clients whose health may seem compromised. Many food pantries provide clients with resources beyond providing food assistance. It may be helpful to develop some procedures or strategies on how to best direct clients to other appropriate local health services.

## The Emergency Food Assistance Program Information

Effective at 5:00pm Monday, March 16, 2020 the State of Maryland Department of Human Services is permitting the Maryland Food Bank and Capital Area Food Bank to undertake the following emergency measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

TEFAP distribution site personnel may complete the SDI on behalf of a customer and sign the document on behalf of a customer. (This applies to both the paper SDI and operational L2F sites as well. For paper versions, the site personnel should sign their name and state, "*on behalf of...*" L2F sites should type in the customer's name on the signature line.)

Customers may access TEFAP twice within a 30 day period.

TEFAP distribution sites should be encouraged to give generous portions of TEFAP commodities during distributions. It is hoped that doing so will reduce the customer's need to travel outside of their household in order to obtain food.

The food banks are *urged* to take all necessary precautions when conducting site monitoring visits. Should your food bank desire to *temporarily* pause site monitoring visits during the pandemic, you are at liberty to do so. Currently, more than six months remain in the federal fiscal year. Thus, ample time exists to still complete the site monitoring visits prior to the end of FFY 2020.

These emergency measures shall remain in place until further notice.

