

## Provisional Guidance for Food Pantries During COVID-19 Pandemic

Given the rapidly evolving situation with the COVID-19 pandemic response, more families and individuals will be seeking resources from food pantries to maintain nutritional well-being. In order to support the continuation of critical food pantry services, while also protecting the health and safety of staff, volunteers, and participants, organizations may want to consider modifying their operations and implementing health and safety protocols. Below is a list of recommendations from various food access agencies in Colorado and around the country. When deciding which strategies work best for your site, please consider variables such as staff and volunteer capacity, client base, and location.

### **Provide safety protocol for staff, volunteers, and participants**

- Refer to the general health guidelines from Tri-County Health Department (TCHD), the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Use the CDC COVID-19 protocol:
  - *Stay home if you do not feel well (fever, runny nose, coughing, etc.) and notify supervisor of illness. Do not return to the workplace until:*
    - You have had no fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever without the use of medicine that reduces fevers)  
**AND**
    - other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough has improved) for three consecutive days  
**AND**
    - At least **7 days** have passed since your symptoms first appeared
  - *Avoid close contact with others who may be sick.*
  - *Thoroughly wash your hands (for 20 seconds) with soap and warm water upon entering the building, after breaks, after using the restroom, after using your phone, sneezing, blowing your nose, and/or touching your face. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer or wipes may be used if soap and water are not readily available.*
  - *Cover sneezes and coughs with a tissue or your arm, then throw the tissue away and wash your hands immediately.*
  - *Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose, and mouth, especially with unwashed hands.*
  - *Use gloves when handling food products. Wash hands before putting on the gloves and after taking them off. Replace gloves if they become ripped, torn or dirty.*
- Customize guidelines to fit the specific needs of each pantry
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently used surfaces and equipment
- Ask shoppers and volunteers who have any respiratory symptoms (cough, fever, runny nose, etc.) or have recently traveled abroad to not visit pantry site

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- Consider encouraging volunteers who are in higher risk categories, such as older adults or people with chronic medical conditions (e.g., heart disease, diabetes, or lung disease), to stay home

#### **Modify operations to limit person-to-person contact and avoid crowds**

- Provide alternative methods for donations and deliveries
  - Mail-in donations
  - No-contact donation drop-off (e.g., a drop-off bin in a secluded place separate from other operations)
  - Low- or no-contact deliveries from food providers
  - Virtual campaign for cash donations
  - Create an Amazon shopping list for donors
- Modify in-take or check-in to minimize contact time and sharing of items like pens and clipboards. Complete some or all of this process over the phone if possible, while shoppers are outside the building. For check-in tasks that must take place in person, encourage people to stay 6 feet apart as much as possible.
- Modify shopper choice models to offer pre-packed boxes or bags or a hybrid model of pre-packed and a few choice items
- As supplies allow, offer larger quantities of non-perishable items to minimize number of return visits to pantries.
- Pick-up and go options for food pantry visitors
  - Set up drive-up mobile pantries
  - Move pick-up location off-site to service more people rapidly and outside of crowded rooms
- Switch from holding pantry hours to appointments only
- Shift volunteer roles to other areas of need – e.g.: Appoint volunteers to take phone calls and pick-up and deliveries
- Direct calls from shoppers to a specific phone line that can be taken by staff or volunteers

#### **Develop and increase communication with communities and partners**

- Use the website's front page to highlight important updates and resources
- Share information with partners, schools, and additional networks
- Send out information through email
- Post on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)
- Provide communication in different languages
- List additional resources and information for shoppers

**Create a Most-Needed list** – There are different groups of people using food pantries that have specific needs. In order to serve participants well it is best practice to build a Most-Needed list of items that can help donors contribute effectively. Below is an example of a shopping guide created by the Food Bank of

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Central and Eastern North Carolina. The list can be extended to include other populations such as people experiencing homelessness, college students, people with disabilities, and immigrants.

Most needed items

<b>For seniors:</b> Nutritional shakes Nutritional drinks Adult hygiene products	<b>For infants and kids:</b> Pedialyte Infant cereal Fruit cups Granola bars Mac and cheese cups Crackers Juice box	<b>For all:</b> Canned fruits and vegetables Canned beans, soup, and meat Cereal Peanut butter
<b>Household items:</b> Disinfectant wipes Bleach Gloves Masks Cleaning solution Mops Trash bags	<b>Paper products:</b> Paper towels Toilet paper Tissues Diapers Wipes	<b>Hygiene Items:</b> Hand sanitizer Soap Toothbrushes Toothpaste Shampoo Deodorant

**Reuse of boxes and bags**

- It does not seem feasible to thoroughly and systematically disinfect plastic grocery bags; therefore, the preference is to use new bags or containers like boxes, which can be properly disinfected.
- Disinfect boxes by wiping with an [EPA recommended disinfectant](https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2) or a recommended bleach solution. A list of approved disinfectants is here: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- Reusable fabric bags fall under the same [CDC Cleaning and Disinfection](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html) guidance for linens and clothing. For more information visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html>