



## **COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Prevention Practices for Food Pantries**

### **Things to do now:**

The Department of Health (DOH) and Center for Disease Control (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.
- Develop procedures that support the recommendations.
- Understand potential supply chain and resource issues.
- Know who to contact.

### **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 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 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Request a waiver from your contractor to alter your client intake process.
  - Upon request, WSDA will issue a temporary exemption to food pantries administering TEFAP to permit staff and volunteers to fill out any paperwork on behalf of their clients. Clients must be able to view and verbally verify the information is correct and 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 (i.e. CSBG funding).

### **Recommendations for future planning:**

The following are not currently required in most areas, but consider including these in your disaster planning:

- Responding to isolated or quarantined people – Can your organization provide service to individuals in isolation or quarantine, such as dropping off meals or supplies?
- A presidential declaration of a State of Emergency or a USDA declaration of a Situation of Distress would allow WSDA to utilize alternate procedures for Household Distribution of TEFAP foods. USDA could also approve reimbursement of increased transportation costs associated with utilizing that distribution method.

### **Share Best Practices:**

The WSDA Food Assistance webpage includes examples of procedures currently being used by other food pantries. Please email [foodassistance@agr.wa.gov](mailto:foodassistance@agr.wa.gov) if you would like to share your procedures or guidance for staff, volunteers and clients. Your material should address the following:

- Preventative measures to reduce the spread of the virus, such as increased cleaning of your facility, directing sick staff or volunteers 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.

### **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 subcontractors' distribution, or using mobile food banks to distribute in areas where food pantries are not open due to insufficient staffing/volunteers.

- As a last resort, if you are closing or suspending operations, please notify your lead contractors or send the information to [foodassistance@agr.wa.gov](mailto:foodassistance@agr.wa.gov)
  - WSDA Food Assistance will maintain a list of closures on their webpage and provide the information to the State Emergency Operations Center.
- USDA commodities through WSDA programs TEFAP, TMP, and CSFP 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.
- If available, you may use your EFAP, TEFAP, and CSFP funding to buy more plastic bags to prepackage produce and paper bags to prepack bags to hand out. These funds can also be used to purchase/rent hand sanitation or hand washing stations from a supplier such as Amazon, Walmart, Mrjohn.com, Unitedrental.com, Servicesanitation.com, Unitedsiteservices.com, Rentnational.com, and OnsiteCo.com.

#### **Who to Contact:**

- If you have questions about how to deliver services or have resource needs please contact Food Lifeline, Northwest Harvest, Second Harvest, WSDA Food Assistance, or your lead contractor.
- Contact your local health department for health related questions and concerns.
- Contact your local emergency operations center for nonfood supplies - county contact listing available ([link](#))
  - If you've exhausted your normal supply channels and can't find nonfood supplies such as cleaning supplies or hand sanitizer, then contacting your local emergency operations center may be the best option.

#### **Sources:**

- Visit [doh.wa.gov/coronavirus](http://doh.wa.gov/coronavirus) for the latest DOH guidance and information. Search under "Guidance" for information specific to community organizations and the "[Outbreak Preparedness for Communities & Community Organizations](#)" factsheet
- Additional guidance for food establishments will be available very soon. This guidance will be relevant to food pantries and meal programs. You can access the
- [Novel Coronavirus Fact Sheet](#) (<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020/FactSheet>) in multiple languages.
- Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/> for additional information from the Centers for Disease Control. Visit <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/novel-coronavirus.aspx> for information from Public Health – Seattle & King County.
- USDA currently offers disaster planning guidance through the [USDA Foods Program Disaster Manual](#) (<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/fdd/disaster-manual.pdf>).
- The "[Sanitation & Hygiene Guidance](#) for Homeless Service Providers," available by visiting [KingCounty.gov](http://KingCounty.gov) and searching by the title.

This document developed in partnership with the Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition, DOH, Food Lifeline, Harvest Against Hunger, Northwest Harvest, Second Harvest, Washington Food Coalition, and WSDA Food Assistance. We will update these recommendations for best practices as the situation evolves.