

Guidance for Food Banks and Food Pantries During an Outbreak of COVID-19

May 28, 2021

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) currently recommend preventative steps to reduce the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19. [Specific guidance](#) is available for administrators and leaders of community- and faith-based organizations.

- ⇒ Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation. Get up-to-date information about local COVID-19 activity from [the KDHE COVID-19 Resource Center](#).
- ⇒ Communicate with your local health department if you are concerned that clients who visit your facility might have COVID-19. [Learn more about COVID-19 symptoms](#).
- ⇒ Download [COVID-19 posters and CDC Fact Sheets](#) and keep your clients and guests informed about public health recommendations to prevent disease spread and about changes to services that might be related to the outbreak. Messaging may include:
 - [Posting signs](#) at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette.
 - Providing educational materials about COVID-19 for non-English speakers, as needed.

Staff Considerations

- ⇒ Implement everyday preventive actions and provide [instructions to your workers](#) about actions to [prevent disease spread](#). Meet with your staff to discuss plans to help clients implement personal preventive measures.
 - Require staff and volunteers to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
 - Consider distributing [gloves](#) for staff and volunteers to wear during food packing and distribution. [Gloves should only be used in addition to proper handwashing practices](#).
- ⇒ [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, cough into your elbow.
- ⇒ Encourage ill staff and volunteers to stay home (or be sent home if they develop symptoms while at the facility), to prevent transmitting the infection to others.
- ⇒ Prepare and plan for operations with a reduced workforce. Identify essential positions and people required to sustain necessary functions and operations.

- ⇒ Minimize the number of staff members who have face-to-face interactions with clients with respiratory symptoms. Use physical barriers to protect staff who will have interactions with clients with unknown infection status. For example, place an additional table between staff and clients to increase the distance between them.
- ⇒ If you identify any client with severe symptoms, [notify your public health department](#). Severe symptoms include:
 - Extremely difficult breathing (not being able to speak without gasping for air)
 - Bluish lips or face
 - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
 - Severe persistent dizziness or lightheadedness
 - New confusion, or inability to arouse
 - New seizure or seizures that won't stop
- ⇒ Ensure that all common areas within the facility follow good practices for environmental cleaning. [Cleaning](#) should be conducted in accordance with [CDC recommendations](#).
 - While the risk of COVID-19 infection from touching surfaces is low, KDHE recommends regular handwashing or use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and cleaning and disinfecting surfaces to reduce risk. To see the latest KDHE cleaning guidance, visit:
<https://www.coronavirus.kdheks.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1966/COVID-19-Cleaning-and-Disinfection-Guidance-Non-Healthcare-Settings-PDF---5-11-2021>.

Distribution and Service Considerations

- ⇒ Reorganize distribution space to promote [social distancing](#) (at least 6 feet of distance between people)
- ⇒ [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. Consider options such as “grab and go” bags or home delivery; avoid distribution of food or other household essentials in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Mobile pantries may also be useful in areas where food pantries are not open due to insufficient staffing/volunteers.
- ⇒ If possible, have clients wash their hands or provide hand sanitizer before selecting food.
- ⇒ 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.

- ⇒ Consider a menu-only option where volunteers take orders from clients and pack bags for them.
- ⇒ Limit visitors to the facility. If your program has an appointment system, admit fewer people for each appointment and add additional appointment times.
- ⇒ Keep clients informed of any changes to regular service operations. This might include sending out emails or posting notices in common areas.
- ⇒ Inform clients of how they might still receive food even if they are sick. Consider implementing a system where a friend or neighbor can pick up their food for them.

