Updated December 11, 2020
*Publication Number 333-262*

# COVID-19 Guidelines for Food Pantries

***Interim notice*** On November 16, Governor Inslee issued proclamation 20-25.8 "*Stay Safe-Stay Healthy*" statewide restrictions to help slow the rapid spread of COVID-19 cases in our state. Unless extended, the restrictions will be in place until January 4, 2021.

Hunger relief organizations that distribute packaged foods, such as food pantries, must limit indoor capacity to 25%. For more information, see the Governor's Office – In-Store Retail Operations COVID-19 Requirements. Hunger relief organizations and meal programs that have restaurant-type models ***may continue indoor dining/food service operations*** during this time, as long as they follow the COVID-19 Guidance for Restaurants.

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On May 4, Governor Inslee announced Safe Start Washington: A Phased Approach to Recovery. In Phase 1, essential businesses, such as food establishments, are allowed to remain open. Food establishments include grocery stores, food pantries, restaurants, and meal programs. No onsite dining is allowed during Phase 1. Once a county moves into Phase 2, grocery stores and food pantries must meet the governor's Phase 2 Limited In-Store Retail Requirements. At this time, Phase 3 and Phase 4 industry specific information is not available. We will update this document when it becomes available.

Use this guidance to comply with the governor's requirements for each phase and help ensure worker and client safety while operating during this pandemic. Washington State Retail Food Code and the governor's requirements are listed below. Recommendations are included under the heading "recommendations" and are based on input from Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Food Assistance Program, Food Banks, and the DOH Food Safety Program. Consult with your local health department for county specific requirements and restrictions.

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## Public Health Investigations

- Notify your local health department within 24 hours if you suspect COVID-19 is spreading in your workplace, or if you are aware of 2 or more employees who develop confirmed or suspected COVID-19 within a 14-day period.
- Cooperate with public health authorities in the investigation of cases, suspected cases, outbreaks, and suspected outbreaks of COVID-19; cooperate with the implementation of infection control measures, including but not limited to isolation and quarantine and environmental cleaning; and comply with all public health authority orders and directives.

## COVID-19 Safety Plan

- Develop a written plan that addresses physical distancing, protective equipment, hygiene, cleaning, communication, screening, and disinfection of contaminated areas. Use the Phase 3 Safe Start Plan Template. This plan must be retained onsite and made available to regulatory agencies upon request.

## Client Log

### Phase 1, Phase 2 & Phase 3

Maintain a daily log of all guests that **voluntarily** provide contact information, including customer names, phone/email, and time/date they were in the facility. Maintain the log for 30 days to help with contact tracing. For more information see:

- Governor's Customer Log Memo
- Customer Log Template

**Phase 4:** Information posted when available.

## Styles of Service & Occupancy

### Phase 1

- Onsite dining is not allowed. Provide pick-up, drive-through or delivery services.

*Recommendations*

- Remove or stack tables and chairs if dining areas can be accessed by customers.
- Work with your local health department to ensure safe processes if making changes to your menu or style of service.

### Phase 2

- Any onsite dining must follow the COVID-19 Guidelines for Restaurants.
- Do not exceed 30% of the maximum building occupancy determined by the fire code. Occupancy limit does not include employees or volunteers.

**Phase 3 & Phase 4:** Information posted when available.

## Best Practices for Different Service Models

We encourage you to consider using different service models to help protect workers and clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of your clients may be considered high-risk for COVID-19, and may be limiting their time in the community to continue to "Stay Home, Stay Healthy." Consider adding/continuing drive-through, curbside pickup, or home delivery as service options to help meet the needs of these high-risk clients.

### DRIVE-THROUGH

- Maintain 6 feet of distance between workers and clients in the car, even if clients wear cloth face coverings.

*Recommendations*

- Provide pre-packed food boxes or bags, making them faster and easier to distribute.
- If allowing clients to choose what food they want, have clients email orders in advance. If in person, verbally tell workers what food items they have chosen.
- Minimize contact by having clients provide information verbally (their name, number in household, and address if a new client or change of address for an existing client) or place their ID on a table or car dashboard to be viewed by a volunteer.
- Place food boxes directly in client's vehicle to avoid hand-to-hand contact, when possible.

### CURBSIDE PICKUP

- Maintain 6 feet of distance between workers and clients, even if clients wear cloth face coverings.
- Use floor markers to maintain 6 feet of distance between clients in indoor and outdoor lines.

*Recommendations*

- Provide pre-packed food boxes or bags, making them faster and easier to distribute.
- If environmental conditions allow, consider setting up tables outside rather than having clients come inside the building.
- Place prepackaged items in a grocery cart for the client to load into their own vehicle. Disinfect carts after each client use.

- If grocery carts are not available, have a designated volunteer hand over boxes and another designated volunteer check people in.

### DELIVERY

- Maintain 6 feet of distance between workers and clients, even if clients wear cloth face coverings.
- Keep cold foods cold (41°F or below) during transport by using a cooler with gel packs/ice or a refrigerator. If unable to keep cold foods cold during delivery or if delivering to a client unable to refrigerate or consume immediately upon receipt, only deliver shelf-stable foods.
- Keep raw foods separate from cooked or ready to eat foods to avoid cross contamination.

*Recommendations*

- Provide home delivery or use designated pick-up areas for clients to maintain physical distancing.
- Routinely clean and disinfect shared equipment, vehicle touchpoints, coolers, and insulated bags used to deliver foods.

### SELF-SELECTED/GROCERY-STYLE

- Follow your typical intake process while minimizing contact time with clients.
- Use floor markers to maintain 6 feet of distance between clients in indoor and outdoor lines.
- Assign workers to assist and monitor clients waiting to enter the establishment.
- Arrange flow of customers to eliminate bottlenecks and reduce crowding.
- Provide hand gel with at least 60% alcohol at the building entrance, when available.
- Stock onsite restrooms/sinks with adequate soap and paper towels and encourage clients to wash their hands before shopping.
- Maintain 6 feet of distance between workers and clients, even if clients wear cloth face coverings.

*Recommendations*

- When possible, provide shopping hours for people at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness.
- Extend hours or open for an additional day to meet building occupancy requirements without reducing services. Consider having appointments or adding additional appointment times.
- Do not offer samples, food demos, or cooking classes.
- Pre-bag foods such as produce or baked goods, that are normally available for self-service.
- Reduce available food options to speed client time onsite. For example, only place on the shelf three different types of soup options.
- Increase circulation of outdoor air by modifying ventilation or opening screened doors/windows, when possible.

## Signage

- Post signs at entrances to inform customers to:
  - Stay home if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
  - Use cloth face coverings when visiting the establishment.
  - Practice proper physical distancing while in the establishment.

*Recommendations*

- Find COVID-19 specific posters and materials here:
  - Washington State Coronavirus Response Partner Toolkit
  - Wear a Face Covering Sign
  - King County Signs to Print and Post
  - CDC's COVID-19 Print Resources

## Sanitation

- Cleaning is a necessary first step for sanitizing and disinfecting chemicals to work effectively. Use soap and water to clean food and non-food contact surfaces.
- Wash, rinse, and sanitize food contact surfaces following routine procedures. Use an EPA registered product at a concentration appropriate for sanitizing food contact surfaces (such as chlorine, quaternary ammonia, or iodine).
- Clean and disinfect high-touch non-food contact surfaces frequently, such as customer restrooms, doors, handles for freezers/refrigerators, and check-out counters.
  - Use an EPA registered product at a concentration that has been shown to be effective against COVID-19. Follow label directions.
  - If disinfectants are in short supply, use alternative disinfectants (for example, 1/3 cup of household bleach added to 1 gallon of water, or 70 percent alcohol solutions). Follow label instructions for application and proper ventilation. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Bleach solutions are effective for disinfection up to 24 hours.
- Ensure employee/volunteer tools and equipment such as handhelds/wearables, scanners, and radios are properly cleaned and disinfected after use.

*Recommendations*

- Disinfect non-food contact surfaces at least every hour when in Phase 1 and Phase 2, and every 2 hours when in Phase 3.
- See the NC State Extension Factsheets on COVID-19 Preventative Measures for more information:
  - What is the Difference between Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting and Sterilizing?
  - Cleaning and Disinfection

## Customer Face Coverings

- Beginning June 26, everyone in an indoor public space, or in an outside public space when unable to physically distance from others, is legally required to wear a face covering.
- Beginning July 7, businesses will not be able to serve customers or visitors who aren't wearing face coverings. Individuals with certain health or medical conditions or disabilities are exempt from the requirement to wear a face covering. Businesses can

offer to provide accommodations such as curbside pick-up, delivery, scheduling of visits during non-peak hours. No one is required to carry proof or documentation of their health condition or disability.

- For additional information see:
  - Overview of COVID-19 Statewide Face Covering Requirements
  - Public Health Order 20-03 – Washington State Department of Health
  - Proclamation 20-25.6 – Office of the Governor
  - Guidance on Cloth Face Coverings – Washington State Department of Health

## Employee/Volunteer Health & Hygiene

- Develop COVID-19 specific employee illness policies and procedures:
  - Screen workers for COVID-19 symptoms prior to each shift by following the Daily COVID-19 Screening of Staff and Visitors guidance. We recommend workers take their own temperature at home and report to the person in charge (PIC) and stay home if they are experiencing a fever (100.4°or higher).
  - Exclude ill food workers for the required time and make sure that they are safe to return to work by following DOH Employee Health & Decision Strategies guidance.
  - Follow current guidelines when responding to a reported COVID-19 positive worker including reporting and contact tracing. Close off any areas where a worker with probably or confirmed COVID-19 worked, touched surfaces, etc. until the area and equipment is cleaned and disinfected. Follow the cleaning guidelines set by the CDC to deep clean and disinfect.
- Stock handwashing sinks and retrain staff on proper handwashing times and procedures.
- Increase utensil washing frequency, handwashing, or use disposable gloves when tools are shared.
- The Governor issued Proclamation 20-46.1 that requires employers to offer high-risk employees, as defined by the CDC, alternative work assignments, including telework, alternative, or remote work locations, and if an alternative assignment is not feasible, retain the position of the high risk worker. The proclamation expires August 1, 2020, unless otherwise extended.

*Recommendations*

- Provide hand gel with at least 60% alcohol, when available.
- Reconfigure employee break times and locations to reduce close contact exposure.

## Employee/Volunteer Training

- Train the person in charge (PIC) in the language they understand best to:
  - Monitor employees/volunteers for COVID-19 symptoms prior to each shift, in addition to the employee health requirements in the Food Code.
  - Enforce the COVID-19 specific written procedures.
- Train workers in the language they understand best on:
  - Identifying symptoms of COVID-19 illness, how to prevent transmission, required hand hygiene, and illness reporting requirements. Reinforce general employee health and safety. For additional information see Basic Employee Training on COVID-19 Infection Prevention from Washington State Department of Labor & Industries.
  - Cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting properly.
  - Implementing the COVID-19 specific written procedures including physical distancing and other needed changes.

## Employee/Volunteer Physical Distancing

- Ensure at least 6 foot separation between all employees, volunteers, and clients except for unavoidable, short-term exposures such as when taking orders or exchanging goods.
- Minimize worker or client interactions in narrow or enclosed areas, use barriers, stagger breaks and work shift starts when strict physical distancing is not feasible for a specific task.
- Barriers should be used at all fixed locations of potential interactions between workers that could be less than 6 feet.

*Recommendations*

- Barriers should be a smooth, rigid surface that is easily cleanable and of sufficient height to provide adequate protection from coughs and sneezes.

## Employee/Volunteer Safety & PPE

- Limit the sharing of objects and discourage touching of shared surfaces; or when in contact with shared objects or frequently touched areas, wear gloves; use alcohol-based hand gel or wash hands before and after contact.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, goggles, face shields, and face masks as appropriate or required to employees for the activity being performed.
- Employers must provide cloth facial coverings to employees, unless their exposure dictates a higher level of protection under the Department of Labor and Industries' safety and health rules. This is not a substitute for 6 foot physical distancing.
  - Reusable cloth face coverings may be used when risk for transmission is low, such as for waiters at restaurants or cafes with curbside pick-up services only.
  - Disposable masks are required when risk for transmission is medium, such as for grocery-store produce stockers who work during store hours around customers or kitchen workers in restaurants.
- Face coverings must be cleaned or replaced after use or when damaged or soiled, may not be shared, and must be properly stored or discarded.
- Employees with medical or disability issues preventing mask use may provide their medical professional's accommodation statement specifying that facial covering or masks should not be worn due to their condition to their employer for consideration of an accommodation.
- For additional information see:
  - Which Mask for Which Task? – Washington State Department of Labor & Industries
  - Coronavirus Facial Covering and Mask Requirements – Washington State Department of Labor & Industries
  - Coronavirus Common Questions Regarding Worker Face Covering and Mask Requirements – Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

## When a Worker or Volunteer Tests Positive for COVID-19

If you are an employer and are notified of a positive COVID-19 employee, contact your local health department within 24 hours, follow DOH Employee Health & Decision Strategies guidance, and use the DOH Checklist for Businesses with Suspected or Confirmed Cases of COVID-19.

### ISOLATION & QUARANTINE

Work with your local health department to identify workers diagnosed with COVID-19 and their close contacts. Have the sick worker self-isolate at home and:

- Identify coworkers that may have been exposed to the COVID 19-positive worker (include from 48 hours before the worker's onset of symptoms through their last work shift). Exposure includes being within 6-feet of a COVID-19 positive person for more than 15 minutes.
- Notify workers of a positive case in the establishment (maintain confidentiality of individual).
- Advise close contacts to self-quarantine at home; or require essential service workers (which includes food workers) who are close contacts but are symptom-free to wear a face covering at all times while at work. Refer workers to DOH COVID-19 from Exposure to Feeling Better guidance to help monitor their health and determine how long to stay home after being exposure to a COVID-19 positive coworker.

### CLEANING & DISINFECTION

Follow CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfecting areas that were used by the sick worker:

- If it has been 7 days or more since the sick worker has been in you establishment, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary. Perform routine cleaning and disinfecting of all high-touch surfaces.
- If it has been less than 7 days since the sick worker has been in your establishment:
    - Close off any areas used by the sick person and wait 24 hours, or as long as possible, before cleaning and disinfecting to minimize potential for other workers to be exposed.
    - During this waiting period, open outside doors and windows if it is safe and use ventilation fans to increase air circulation.
    - Clean and disinfect areas used by the sick person. This includes offices, bathrooms, common areas, and shared equipment.
    - Vacuum the space if necessary using a vacuum equipped with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter, if available. Do not vacuum when people are present.
    - Areas can be re-opened after the proper disinfecting is complete.

### FOOD DESTRUCTION

There is currently no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted to humans through food or food packaging materials. The FDA does not anticipate food will need to be held, recalled, or withdrawn from the market if exposed to coronavirus through a COVID-19 positive food facility worker. Discard food contaminated by coughs or sneezes. For more information see FDA's Food Safety and Coronavirus Disease website.

## Repackaging and Labeling Foods

You must use barriers (such as gloves or utensils) to prevent bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, use food-grade packaging, and label packages with the following information:

- Common name of food.
- Ingredient and allergen information.
- Name and place of business of the food manufacturer, packer, or distributor.
- Net quantity of contents.
- For PHF/TCS foods: safe handling instructions, such as "keep refrigerated," or "keep frozen."

The local health department must approve specialized packaging methods, such as vacuum packing or canning, **in advance**. For additional information: FDA Constituent Update – March 26, 2020.

### REPACKAGING BULK MEAT PRODUCTS

USDA is making an exception during the COVID-19 pandemic to allow bulk meat products intended for use by restaurants to be sold to retail consumers. Repackage these items and label them to duplicate the label on the incoming container with all the required features except the USDA mark of inspection. For additional information: USDA-FSIS Constituent Update – March 23, 2020.

### REPACKAGING SHELL EGGS

FDA is allowing the sale of eggs in cartons or flats without labels during the COVID-19 pandemic if certain conditions are met:

- A sign is posted at the point of purchase with:
  - Name and place of business of the food manufacturer, packer or distributor.
  - Safe handling instructions for raw eggs.
- If eggs from multiple suppliers are offered for sale at the same time, it must be clear to consumers which sign/label applies to the product.
- Eggs are sold by the complete carton or flat.
- There are no nutrition claims.

For additional information: FDA Temporary Policy Regarding Packaging and Labeling Shell Eggs – April 2020.

## How to Conserve Sanitation Supplies

### GLOVES

Gloves are important for both food safety and personal protection. Some gloves may be rationed by the medical community or otherwise in short supply, such as nitrile or latex gloves. Gloves that are made of poly or vinyl may be a good alternative for food service uses. Gloves, or other barriers, are only required for food safety when used to avoid touching ready-to-eat food with bare hands. We encourage you to consider alternatives such as using tissue papers, tongs, or other utensils instead of gloves. You can discontinue handling/serving a particular ready to

eat food if you do not have a safe way to handle it. See DOH guidance on proper glove use for more information.

### HAND SANITIZER

Washing your hands for 20 seconds is the best way to get rid of any virus on your hands. Hand sanitizers that are at least 60 percent alcohol can help, but are in short supply at this time. It is not a food safety requirement to have hand sanitizer, and a food pantry or meal program may operate without it as long as stocked handwashing sinks are available. Look into alternative suppliers, such as local distilleries that are producing alcohol based hand antiseptics to assist with demand.

NOTE: Some hand sanitizers have been recalled by FDA for the potential presence of undeclared methanol (wood alcohol). For additional information see the FDA Recalls, Market Withdrawals, & Safety Alerts website.

### CLEANING CHEMICALS, SANITIZERS AND DISINFECTANTS

Use cleaning chemicals for both food safety and infection control. We expect them to be in high demand in the coming months. To help conserve supplies, retrain staff on procedures for effective cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting. Coronaviruses can be destroyed when surfaces are properly cleaned and disinfected. Monitor sanitizer and disinfectant concentrations to ensure effective, but not excessive, product is being used.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Is it safe to accept a donation of garden produce during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Yes. COVID-19 is not known to be transmissible through food. Our general food safety recommendation is to rinse raw produce under running water using as much agitation as the produce can handle, before cutting and/or serving.

**Is it appropriate to wash or use sanitizer on food service gloves?**

Food service gloves are considered single-use articles and may not be reused or washed or cleaned if they are used with ready-to-eat food. Discard contaminated gloves and wash hands for 20 seconds.

**Can hunger relief organizations still take donations from individuals?**

Yes. Currently, there are no restrictions on individual donations from members of your community in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. We encourage individuals to follow the food safety recommendations in our Food Rescue Donation Guide for Home Kitchens and for food businesses to follow recommendations in our Food Rescue Donation Guide for Businesses.

**Is it safe to sell unpacked produce?**

Yes. COVID-19 is not known to be transmissible through food, including fruits and vegetables. We encourage pre-bagging and portioning to expedite purchasing and shopping time by customers. Always wash hands thoroughly before and during food handling.

**Should we allow customers to use reusable grocery bags?**

It is unlikely to get infected with COVID-19 by touching reusable shopping bags. According to the CDC, touching surfaces that may have the virus on it is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. However, the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries has directed grocers to prohibit the use of reusable shopping bags and provide single use bags instead. We encourage you to review Coronavirus: Protecting Grocery Store Workers for more information.

**Generally, programs use banana boxes that may be touched by many hands over time. Should we disinfect boxes that are being given to clients?**

We recommend non-food contact surfaces be cleaned of spills as needed and disinfected often. Unfortunately, banana boxes are not easy to clean. If you are going to reuse the cardboard boxes and they are not made of material that can be washed and disinfected, the best practice is to wash your hands after handling the boxes and similarly advise clients.

## More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the current COVID-19 situation in Washington, Governor Inslee's proclamations, symptoms, how it spreads, and how and when people should get tested. See our Frequently Asked Questions for more information.
The risk of COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity or nationality. Stigma will not help to fight the illness. Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak (COVID-19)
- WA State Coronavirus Response (COVID-19)
- Find Your Local Health Department or District
- CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Stigma Reduction Resources

**Have more questions about COVID-19?** Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127.** For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.