

## Staying Safe at Food Pantries During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Food pantries are essential to distribute nutritious foods to individuals and families in need, and are of heightened importance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following information is aimed at food pantry staff and volunteers, as well as those visiting food pantries, in order to provide a basic understanding of COVID-19, safety concerns, common misperceptions and barriers to encourage food pantries to stay open while helping ensure safety of all involved.

### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the short name for ‘coronavirus disease 2019’ — corona (CO) virus (VI) disease (D) discovered in 2019 (-19). COVID-19 is considered a severe, acute respiratory syndrome (or, SARS), and is caused by a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing COVID-19 is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, such as the common cold. Corona, or ‘crown’ viruses, get their name from their spikey, crown-like appearance.

### Symptoms of COVID-19

Adults with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported, ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. These symptoms might appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fever</li> <li>▪ Cough</li> <li>▪ Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing</li> <li>▪ Chills</li> <li>▪ Repeated shaking with chills</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Muscle pain</li> <li>▪ Headache</li> <li>▪ Sore throat</li> <li>▪ New loss of taste or smell</li> </ul> |
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### Who is at Risk of COVID-19?

Anyone can become infected by the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. However, recent investigations have found the following vulnerable populations to be at higher risk of hospitalization and complications.<sup>1,3,4</sup>

- Older adults (65 years or older)
- Those with an underlying medical condition, such as high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, heart disease or other respiratory disease
- Those with asthma
- Those with HIV

Take extra precautions to help ensure safety of staff, volunteers and visitors who could be vulnerable to higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions)

The following key strategies and recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can help ensure staff, volunteer, and visitor safety during food pantry distribution.

## Social Distancing

The novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby, or inhaled into the lungs.

Since spread is more likely when people are in close contact, keeping space between you and others is one of the best tools to avoid being exposed to the virus, known as *social* or *physical distancing*.

1. Stay at least six feet (about two arms' length) from other people
2. Do not gather in groups, and stay out of crowded places

### **Examples:**

- Limit the number of people in food pantry space
- Extend hours or open an additional day to reduce congestion
- Restructure the physical layout of the area to increase available space between people
- Move events from inside locations to outside areas
- Create other distribution methods, such as a drive-thru option for visitors, increasing home delivery efforts, providing prepackaged bags, or instead of browsing food, consider a menu-style option where volunteers take orders from visitors and pack the bags for them
- Extend to more rooms or areas to improve social distancing
- Schedule volunteers on a rotating schedule to minimize group contact

## Cleaning and Disinfection

The general goal is to keep objects and surfaces as clean and free of 'bad' germs as possible, requiring the following on a routine schedule:

- Frequent cleaning, and
- Application of a disinfectant and/or sanitizer

<b>Task</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Clean	To remove dirt and debris by scrubbing and washing with a detergent solution and rinsing with water.
Disinfect	To destroy or inactivate most germs on any inanimate object, but not bacterial spores.
Sanitize	To reduce germs on inanimate surfaces to levels considered safe by public health codes or regulations.

### **The CDC recommends:**

- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects with water and a detergent (e.g., soap) prior to disinfection, especially surfaces that are visibly dirty.
- Use an EPA-registered disinfectant for use against virus that causes COVID-19.

EPA-Registered Disinfectants | [epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2](https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2)

## Bleach:

- Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted and used on appropriate surfaces.
  - Check the label to see if your bleach is intended for disinfection, and ensure the product is not past its expiration date.
  - Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation.
  - Leave solution on the surface for at least one minute.
  - To make a bleach solution, mix:
    - Five tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water, or
    - Four teaspoons bleach per quart of water
- Additional information on cleaning and disinfection of community facilities.

CDC | [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html)

Disinfecting Video | [youtu.be/7vOoa3x1qSo](https://youtu.be/7vOoa3x1qSo)

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.
- Some bleaches, such as those designed for safe use on colored clothing or for whitening, might *not* be suitable for disinfection.
- Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.

## Handwashing

Handwashing with soap and clean water is one of the best ways to protect yourself and others from getting sick from a number of illnesses by preventing the spread of 'bad' germs. Germs in respiratory droplets from the nose and mouth can land on surfaces that you and others commonly touch with your hands. Germs from your and others' unwashed hands can get into food and drinks while they are being prepared or consumed. Germs can also be transferred to other objects, such as tabletops or handrails, remain viable for up to several days, and then be transferred to others' hands. The novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has been found to survive:<sup>5</sup>

- Up to 4 hours on copper
- Up to 24 hours on cardboard
- Up to 2 to 3 days on plastic and stainless steel

For handwashing to be effective, it should be performed often, especially around key times when spreading germs is more likely.

### *Before and After:*

- Arrival to the facility and after breaks
- Preparing food or drinks
- Eating or handling food
- Conducting temperature screenings
- Putting on a face mask or other personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Caring for someone who is sick

### *After:*

- Blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- Using the toilet
- Touching animals/pets, feed or waste
- Handling garbage

### ***Handwashing Steps:***

1. **Wet:** Use clean, running water
2. **Lather:** With soap, it can lift dirt, grease, and germs from skin
3. **Scrub:** With soap for at least 20 seconds to provide ample coverage and duration
4. **Rinse:** Completely to get help rinse dirt, grease and germs down the sink
5. **Dry:** Completely, as germs are transferred more easily to and from wet hands

Proper Handwashing Steps | [vimeo.com/404132650](https://vimeo.com/404132650)  
Scrub Up, Tune Up Handwashing Program | [howdyhealth.tamu.edu/scrubup](http://howdyhealth.tamu.edu/scrubup)

## Covering Coughs and Sneezes

Since coronavirus is spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets, train staff and communicate to visitors these tips:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and then putting your used tissue in a waste basket. Note: Keep tissues and waste baskets available.
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve (not your hands) when no tissue is available.
- Wash your hands after coughing or sneezing.

## Hand Sanitizer

Whenever possible, wash hands often with soap and water. However, if soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Do not use hand sanitizer when your hands are visibly dirty. In such cases, always wash hands with soap and water.

The EPA recommends not to use hand sanitizers on children under 24 months of age.

## Cloth Face Coverings

When feasible, the CDC recommends that adults and older children should wear face coverings within the facility. Cloth face coverings should not be put on babies and children under age two, because of the danger of suffocation.

For guidelines on how to properly put on, take off and clean cloth face masks  
[vimeo.com/406289696](https://vimeo.com/406289696)

## Stay Home if Sick

It is important to stay home if you are sick or have been exposed to a family or household member who is sick. Also, communicate to any potential visitors to stay home when they are sick.

See CDC guidance on what to do if you are sick  
[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html)

## Stay Up To Date


Ensure that your events have supplies for event staff and participants, such as hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, disposable facemasks, and cleaners and disinfectants.

Stay up to date on development in your community, including guidelines from your local health department in case there are any changes in community spread of COVID-19. Work with your local health department to stay up-to-date on other concerns that might affect the offering of your food pantry.

### Key Resources

Government: [Coronavirus.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov) | CDC: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov)  
Texas DSHS: [dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus](https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus) | Texas EDEN: [texashelp.tamu.edu](https://texashelp.tamu.edu)

## References

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2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>
3. Garg, S., Kim, L., Whitaker, M., et al. (April 17, 2020) Hospitalization rates and characteristics of patients hospitalized with laboratory-confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 — COVID-NET, 14 States, March 1-30, 2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69(15), 458-464. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6915e3.htm> - F1 down
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5. van Doremalen, N., Bushmaker, T., Morris, D. H., Holbrook, M. G., Gamble, A., Williamson, B. N., ... & Lloyd-Smith, J. O. (2020). Aerosol and surface stability of SARS-CoV-2 as compared with SARS-CoV-1. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 382(16), 1564-1567.

Prepared by: Mark D. Faries, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Extension Health Specialist  
Family & Community Health | Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

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