



With the spread of COVID-19, we wanted to reach out to assure you that our top priority is the health and safety of everyone who works in our pantries and the people who rely on us. We have been seeking guidance from Feeding America, Feeding Pennsylvania and Hunger-Free Pennsylvania in order to protect you and your participants while also ensuring food is making its way to the people who need it.

The following steps have been recommended by Feeding America, Feeding PA, Hunger-Free PA and the Centers for Disease Control to help reduce the risk for both participants and pantry workers:

1. **Please don't close down!** Although it may be tempting to go into full lock-down mode, please continue your food pantry services to whatever extent you are able. Now is a particularly trying time for those who are susceptible for food insecurity – and, in fact, there may well be a marked increase in new requests for help. Your pantry has an important role in your community – now more than ever.

If you must close or change your distribution days or hours, please alert Dave Cool, Agency Relations Coordinator, at dcool@caclv.org or 484-287-4015 immediately so we can update our website and referral list to get the word out to our participants.

2. **Attempt to engage volunteers** who are younger and/or who don't have pre-existing health conditions that make them more potentially vulnerable to COVID-19. If your regular volunteers become hard to line up, remember that there may be working-age people in your community whose employers have closed and they are stuck at home twiddling their thumbs. A call for new volunteers via social media, faith-based and other community groups. Please consider shifting your hours to accommodate any new volunteers.

If you are having trouble getting volunteers, please alert Dave Cool, Agency Relations Coordinator, at dcool@caclv.org or 484-287-4015, so we can try to assist you in finding some.

3. **Practice safe hygiene precautions** (which are also attached as a nifty flyer you can print out and put up in your pantries). Hand-washing is preferable to the use of antibacterial gels (here is a list of songs to sing while you sud in case you're tired of Happy Birthday... <https://www.today.com/health/songs-sing-while-washing-hands-coronavirus-hand-washing-songs-t175755>).
4. **Post safe practices signage** in your pantries. Signage is available at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).
5. **Intensify cleaning practices.** The Centers for Disease Control has recommendations here... <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

6. **Implement drive-through food distribution.** This can be accomplished through pre-packed boxes/bags. Please consider making a few special needs boxes/bags such as nut-free, gluten-free and vegan/vegetarian. Grocery stores may be willing to donate “t-shirt” bags if you need them.
7. **Allow households to order food in advance** for pick up at a scheduled time.
8. **Practice social distancing** (if drive-up or pre-ordered distribution is not possible) by allowing only one member of each household to come into the pantry. Other family members should be encouraged to wait outside or in cars and remain away from other members of the community.
9. **Consider creating food packages** geared toward children who normally get breakfast and lunch at school, but who may be home due to closures. This could include mac & cheese, soups and other meals that can be made in the microwave, snack bars, fruits and vegetables, shelf-stable milk, cereals, and so on.
10. **Use proxy waivers.** From now until May 31, pantry volunteers can sign as a proxy for each food pantry receipt. You can do this by following these steps:

1. Ask the participant if they give permission to sign on their behalf.
2. If filling out a new form, the volunteer will need to say:

I understand the household income limitations and hereby certify that my household size and income make me eligible for participation in the program. I also certify that, as of today, my household lives in the area served by Pennsylvania in The Emergency Food Assistance Program. This certification form is being completed in connection with the receipt of Federal assistance.

I UNDERSTAND THAT MAKING A FALSE STATEMENT MAY RESULT IN MY HAVING TO PAY FOR THE VALUE OF THE FOOD IMPROPERLY ISSUED TO ME AND MAY SUBJECT ME TO CRIMINAL PROSECUTION UNDER STATE AND FEDERAL LAW.

3. The volunteer can sign as a proxy and the participant can receive food.
4. During this time, the participant can bring a note stating they are a proxy for someone else.

11. **See additional recommendations** from the PA Dept. of Agriculture Bureau of Food Assistance on next page.

Further guidance will be shared as it becomes available. If you have questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to Dave Cool, Agency Relations Coordinator, at dcool@caclv.org or 484-287-4015.

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Prevention Practices for Food Banks and Food Pantries

Things to do now:

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (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.
<https://www.naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory?searchType=standard&lhd-search=&lhd-state=PA>
- Develop procedures that support the recommendations.
- Understand potential supply chain and resource issues.

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 a 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 food packages.**
- 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.

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 agencies' distributions, or using mobile pantries to distribute in areas where food pantries are not open due to insufficient staffing/volunteers.
- **USDA Foods being offered through TEFAP and CSFP are continuing to come into the state in large quantities. If your food bank receives direct shipments of these products, be aware that these deliveries will continue and staff must be available to accept them.**

Additional Resources:

- Pennsylvania Department of Health:
<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Contact Information:
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Food Assistance
1-800-468-2433
RA-Fooddist@pa.gov