



Developed in consultation with the Department of Human Services in its role as the lead agency on the Emergency Food Systems Task Force

Food Shelf Best Practices to Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Minnesota Department of Health is coordinating the state's response to COVID-19. Please visit their website for the most up to date information: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html>

As guidance is updated, Hunger Solutions Minnesota will post or link to it and email a notice to food shelves that changes have been made. In addition, Hunger Solutions Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Human Services recommends following the guidance issued by Minnesota Department of Health and the CDC.

This document applies the MDH guidance to food shelf operations and ensures program changes remain in line with TEFAP policy. These best practices for divided into four (4) areas:

- 1) workforce (paid and volunteer)
- 2) food distribution
- 3) communications
- 4) what to do in the case of potential closure

We affirm that:

- Food shelves care about continuing their services in ways that prioritize the health and safety of staff, volunteers, and clients.
- Food shelves are essential community resources.
- Most TEFAP programs are managed and staffed by volunteers between the ages of 55 and 80.
- People who receive food from food shelves have disproportionately higher rates of chronic health conditions and disabilities. Some are also seniors living alone.
- COVID 19 poses greater threats to people over the age of 70 with [underlying health conditions](#).

Start using these best practices now.

WORKFORCE STRATEGIES

- Follow advice from public health experts.** Visit the [Minnesota Department of Health's website](#).
 - Wash hands frequently using hot soapy water ([posters are available at the MDH website](#))
 - Frequently sanitize high contact touch points (like doorknobs, service counters and bathrooms)
 - Avoid unnecessary physical contact within the food shelf.

- Disposable gloves may be useful for sanitation control and to remind people to take precautions such as not touching their face.

☐ Adhere to social distancing protocols.

- For both staff and volunteers working in the food shelf and clients waiting to get food:
 - Avoiding gatherings of 10 or more people.
 - Keep a distance of 6 feet from other people.

☐ Create and post a food shelf “sick policy” for volunteers.

- The message is simple: PLEASE DON'T VOLUNTEER IN THE FOOD SHELF IF YOU ARE ILL OR ARE LIVING WITH SOMEONE WHO IS ILL OR BELIEVE YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO COVID-19
- Remind volunteers of this policy regularly.
- Require volunteers to tell you as soon as possible AND then must not come in for their shift if they:
 - they are sick, including fever, cough, shortness of breath
 - they have traveled within the last 14 days or have been exposed/known potential to COVID – 19 locally
 - they are an older adult or person of any age who has a serious underlying medical condition
- Make sure everyone understands not to return before they've recovered and their time away has reached the medically-advised window.
- Volunteers who may have had large-scale social contact – regardless of whether or not they've had symptoms – should also avoid the food shelf for the self-quarantine period recommended by health experts.

☐ [Print and display posters from the Minnesota Department of Health](#) on: preventing the spread of COVID-19, preventing discrimination about COVID-19, and basic facts about COVID-19

☐ Assess your food shelf's service capacity:

- Are there enough back-up volunteers to maintain the food shelf's service hours if your team is reduced?
- What functions require particular skills and physical capacities (i.e. operating trucks, trailers, forklifts, pallet jacks, hand trucks, loading and unloading, lifting, making runs to pick up food rescue and other assigned sources)? Do you have a back-up for these functions? If not, consider reassigning volunteers for essential functions, temporarily stopping nonessential tasks, or altering or reducing food shelf hours.
- Discuss this with key members of your team now, so they help participate in decision that will affect their work.

- Agree that vulnerable volunteers will take a sabbatical.** Volunteers age 55 and older and those with chronic health conditions should avoid interpersonal contact. Likewise, volunteers who care for vulnerable dependents at home should consider a break from food shelf service at this time. Talk with volunteers about safeguarding their own health. **Insist this is a priority for all.**

FOOD DISTRIBUTION STRATEGIES

- Remind clients/participants that if they become ill, they should send a proxy to the food shelf for their food.**
- Food shelves will need to change how they distribute food** during COVID 19.
 - Participant choice is the acknowledged standard during normal times, but during COVID 19, best practices are those that reduce touching and handling of food and surfaces.
 - **Identify low-contact strategies for food shelves where participants drive to pick up their food: Strategies could include, but are not limited to:**
 - Pre-packing groceries and loading them in participant vehicles is a low-contact food distribution strategy.
 - Offering each household a list of current foods that they can pick up and review OUTSIDE the food shelf and asking people to wait in their cars while groceries are packed to order and brought outside for pickup.
 - Does your food shelf have the volunteer and logistical capacity to distribute using low-contact strategies?
 - Consider whether people walk, drive, or take public transit to your food shelf.
 - Develop strategies that are client centered as much as possible when trying to reduce contact with staff, volunteers, and clients.
 - Client intake:
 - No signatures are required at distributions. /data privacy/sign-in sheets/TEFAP forms – staff can collect household information
 - Continue to post Federal poverty guidelines, data privacy policies, and civil rights posters where clients can see them – may need to adjust based on where clients are picking up food, for example – posted on the outside of a building.
 - Visual verification is acceptable for those who are TEFAP eligible.
 - May use weekly income to verify eligibility (vs. monthly income).
- Frequency of service and amount of food provided:**
 - **All food shelves should try to provide additional supplies** of shelf-stable and perishable food for households.
 - Health experts advise that a 14-day isolation period is needed following exposure to the coronavirus COVID 19. Food shelf clients might need larger food packages than usual to

provide for their families in case they need to self-quarantine. Please try to accommodate that if possible.

- Households may be served more than once a month, if the food shelf has the inventory to do so.
- Take advantage of TEFAP and Trade Mitigation foods, which are free sources of food to food shelves.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- Volunteers and staff should update their emails and phone numbers.** Make sure your volunteers remain reachable.
- Update your food shelf's outgoing phone message at least weekly.**
 - Even if you keep current hours of service, people will want to confirm that you are open before they come.
 - Change your outgoing message if you change or reduce hours of service.
 - Contact your regional food bank and Hunger Solutions Minnesota with changes. Send to Jill Westfall jwestfall@hungersolutions.org and Joe Walker jwalker@hungersolutions.org
- Tell participants to check the food shelf's phone message to confirm you're open.**
 - Having updated information on your food shelf's hours may reduce anxiety about food security.
 - If you must close for any reason, make sure that you include that in your outgoing message and refer them to another food shelf or MN Food HelpLine 1-888-711-1151.
- Post your food shelf's current phone number on the front door.** This is an ongoing TEFAP requirement at all times.
- If your food shelf takes phone messages, continue checking the messages regularly.**
 - Participants who live alone might need assistance getting food.
 - Designate a reliable staff/volunteer to monitor incoming messages and make a plan for what you will do if someone leaves a distress message.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU MUST TEMPORARILY CLOSE THE FOOD SHELF OR CHANGE HOURS

- Make an independent decision about your food shelf's "open" and "closed" status.**
 - Some food shelves may be unable to remain open due to staff/volunteer shortages, limited food sourcing options, quarantines, etc. Your safety and health need to remain at the forefront of your decisions to remain open or to close.
- Contact your regional food bank and Hunger Solutions MN immediately** to let them know that you must close, when and how long. Update them as the situation changes.

Thank you for taking the time to prevent the spread of COVID – 19 and your efforts to feed Minnesotans in need.