



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Guidance for Food Pantries and Homeless Shelters

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), Center for Food Protection (CFP) recommends the following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) preventive steps to reduce the risk of getting and spreading any viral respiratory infections:

- Implement the recommendations listed below, as applicable.
- Develop procedures that support the recommendations.
- Stay Informed with the most recent information from CDC and RIDOH.

General recommendations to prevent illness:

Clean your hands often

- 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

- Avoid close contact (within six feet) with people who are sick.
- Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community.

Take steps to protect others

- 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 tissue isn't available, cough only into your elbow.
- Reorganize your space to promote "social distancing" (at least six 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 using the following cleaning guidelines: [CDC Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations](#)

Additional recommendations to prevent the spread of illness:

- 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 groceries.



- If you have hand sanitizer available, ask clients to use it as soon as they come into the food pantry or homeless shelter.
- If possible, ask clients to 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.
- Consider increasing home delivery, if possible. This is especially important for vulnerable populations, such as older adults.
- 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.

Additional Food Safety Recommendations:

- Use sanitizing solution to **frequently sanitize commonly touched surfaces and objects** such as cash machine keypads, counter tops, dining tables, doorknobs, electronics, faucet handles, and menus frequently throughout the day. Change the chlorine-based sanitizing solution at least once every four hours.
- **Ensure dishwasher and/or three-compartment sinks are used properly and have the appropriate level of sanitizer** for final rinse (50-100 PPM chlorine-based sanitizer, follow product label for other approved sanitizers).
- **Ensure sneeze guards are in place** where required.
- If you have food employees at higher risk for COVID-19, such as people age 60 or older, people with underlying health conditions (such as heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes), people with weakened immune systems, or, out of an abundance of caution, people who are pregnant and who may be more susceptible to viral respiratory infections: **consider temporarily re-assigning** them to non-public-contact duties.

For the most recent Rhode Island information, please visit the RIDOH web page on COVID-19: [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#). For additional information for preventing COVID-19 Spread in the community, please visit, [CDC Preventing COVID-19 spread in Communities](#). For additional information for homeless shelters, please visit the CDC web page, [Homeless Shelter Guidance for COVID-19](#).