



COVID-19 Recommendations for Emergency Food Providers

Recent efforts to slow the spread of [COVID-19](#) have a significant impact on how emergency food programs operate. Recognizing the importance of ensuring these programs continue during this time of uncertainty, the Health Unit is asking programs to consider the following recommendations to help protect staff, volunteers and patrons visiting emergency food programs while continuing to operate.

If you have challenges with these recommendations and/or decide to put your program on hold, please notify the Health Unit so this information can be shared with others. Contact the Health Unit at 1-800-563-2808 extension 5210 or email healthy.living@healthunit.ca. For food safety related inquiries, contact the Environmental Health department at extension 5400 or email environmental.health@healthunit.ca.

Food Banks and Community Meal Programs/Soup Kitchens

- Direction for volunteers:
 - If volunteers have not travelled out of the country, but are feeling unwell or show symptoms of [respiratory illness](#), they should not attend the program until they have been symptom-free for 24 hours.
 - If volunteers have travelled outside of Canada (including to the US) in the last 14 days, they are required to [self-isolate](#) and are not permitted to attend the program, even if they are feeling well.
 - If volunteers have recently travelled and are experiencing respiratory illness symptoms, they should call the [Health Unit](#) to be assessed.
 - If volunteers have had contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, they are required to [self-isolate](#) for 14 days and are not permitted to attend the program, even if they are feeling well.
 - Volunteers who are in self-isolation can still contribute to program efforts. Consider asking them to participate in tasks from home, including scheduling pick-ups, calling vulnerable community members to ensure that they are safe and have the resources they need, and sharing fundraising information through their networks.
 - Stress the importance of handwashing to volunteers. Encourage them to do so often with



soap and water for at least 20 seconds before preparing food, after using the washroom, after touching their face, after coughing or sneezing (into their elbow), etc. If there is no handwashing sink onsite, ensure hand sanitizer (70% alcohol) is available.

- Ensure every person entering your building is screened and asked the following questions:
 - Do you have any respiratory illness symptoms, such as fever, new or worsening cough, or difficulty breathing/shortness of breath?
 - Have you travelled outside of Canada (including to the US) in the past 14 days?
 - Have you had contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19?

Anyone who answers “Yes” to one or more of these questions must not be allowed to enter. Provide services to patrons while they remain outside the facility and maintain [social distancing](#), with two metres between people. Remind patrons of the requirement to self-isolate as appropriate (as outlined in previous point for volunteers).

- Post highly visible signage that states the above at each entrance. Ensure staff and volunteers are aware of these recommendations.
- Increase on-site cleaning and disinfecting, especially in high traffic areas and high touch surfaces.
- Have premade packages/hampers ready for differing household sizes for quick distribution, while remaining open to accommodating the food preferences of patrons.
- Do not divide items into smaller packages and provide only unopened packages.
- If you are aware of patrons who are unwell, do not have transportation, or are [self-isolating](#), consider offering a delivery service or continuing to provide services in other ways to these patrons.
- Limit gatherings of people in lines and waiting areas as much as possible. Ensure people are able to maintain [social distancing](#), staying at least 2 metres apart, while waiting.
- Limit the number of people allowed into the space at one time. This will increase the time it takes to serve patrons, so consider extending program hours if possible.
- Consider increasing the provisions provided to patrons to reduce the number of visits that



people need to make to your program and others in the community, and in the case of patrons needing to [self-isolate](#).

- Ensure handwashing sinks and approved hand sanitizer (70% alcohol) are available.
- If you decide to modify your service delivery, or close or put your program on hold, please notify the Health Unit so this information can be shared with others.

Additional Considerations for Community Meal Programs/Soup Kitchens

- To avoid large gatherings of people, utilize takeaway options for meals.
 - Takeaway meals could include a bagged meal that can be taken home to be eaten. If you can, distribute meals outside of the building, rather than have patrons enter the facility.
 - If meals are being distributed hot, they should be eaten as soon as possible, or refrigerated.
 - Label meals with the date it was prepared and a best before date.

Receiving Donations

- Encourage donation of funds rather than food products to limit contact between donors and food bank personnel, and to better meet the needs of clients.
- Evidence of transmission of COVID-19 through contact with food products is limited. However, efforts should be made to reduce transmission risk when receiving donations.
 - Wash or sanitize hands before and after receiving donations onsite and when picking them up in the community.
 - If donations are being picked up, maintain social distancing and/or ask for donations to be placed outside for pick up.
 - Make hand sanitizer available for donor use before donations are transferred at your program.
 - Ask donors who are sick to stay at home until they have been symptom-free for 24 hours, and to consider providing donations after their self-isolation period is over.
 - If possible, promote online monetary donations through organizational websites or e-transfers.



Remember that all emergency food programs are different, so your solutions may look the same as or different from other local programs. Contact the Health Unit for support with deciding what will work for your program while keeping everyone as healthy as possible.

For more information, additional support or to share a notification about a change in services, please call the Health Unit at 705-474-1400 extension 5210 or email healthy.living@healthunit.ca.

General Information on what can you do to protect yourself

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If you are unable to access soap and water, use 70% alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue or into your elbow, not into your hand.
- Stay home if you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others until you have been symptom free for 24 hours.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Practice [social distancing](#) - maintain a distance of 2 metres between yourself and others.

Additional Resources

North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit website:
<https://www.myhealthunit.ca/en/health-topics/coronavirus.asp>

North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit social media accounts: [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

Ministry of Health - Guidance for Food Premises:
https://www.myhealthunit.ca/en/health-topics/resources/diseases/COVID19_Food-Premises_Final-20200319.pdf

Public Health Ontario: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/public-resources>

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