Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

Guideline for Community-Based Food Programs

We understand the importance of keeping food and community meal programs functioning during the COVID-19 emergency. This document is intended for community-based food programs including: soup kitchens; community kitchens; and non-profit organizations offering meals prepared and served to the public. This document is also based upon current knowledge and it should be understood that guidance is subject to change as new data become available and new developments arise with this new virus; furthermore, unique situations may require some discretion in adjusting these guidelines which are meant to be supportive, not prescriptive.

WHAT is COVID-19?
COVID-19 is a respiratory infection caused by a newly identified virus. The infection has symptoms similar to other respiratory illnesses, including the flu and common cold: cough, sneezing, fever, sore throat and difficulty breathing. Other symptoms can include fatigue, muscle aches, diarrhea, headache or lost sense of smell. While most people infected with COVID-19 experience only mild illness, severe illness can occur in some people, especially in those with weaker immune systems, the elderly and those with chronic medical conditions.

HOW is COVID-19 Spread?
COVID-19 is spread through liquid droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus in these droplets can enter through the eyes, nose or mouth of another person if they are in close contact with the person who coughed or sneezed. COVID-19 is not transmitted through particles in the air and is not something that can enter the body through the skin.

CAN COVID-19 be transmitted through food or food packaging?
The risk of transfer of coronavirus via food or food packaging is considered to be low. Carrying out hand washing prior to handling food and after handling food packaging will further minimize the risk.

IS it safe to handle money?
Although money is not likely to be a primary mode of transmission of coronavirus, it may be possible to transfer the virus by touching contaminated money and then your eyes, mouth, or nose afterwards. Ensure that regular hand hygiene practices are followed after handling

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HOW can staff and volunteers in facilities offering community-based food programs protect themselves and the public from COVID-19?

Facilities offering community-based food programs will need to develop their own policies and procedures to minimize the risk COVID-19 poses to the health of its staff/volunteers, and to the public they serve.

The information presented in this guideline informs a number of potential actions for reducing the risk of transmission. However, each facility must be assessed for transmission risks such that the appropriate combination of measures can be implemented.

When developing COVID-19 mitigation policies and procedures, consult the enclosed tip sheets and note the goals and considerations for each of the following areas of concern:

- Site Management
- Physical Distancing
- Signage
- Sanitation
- Staff/volunteer Sickness and Return to Work Policies
- Personal Hygiene and Training

WHAT to do if a client appears sick

If a client appears sick, advise the client to contact 8-1-1, or use the BC COVID-19 self-assessment tool for further guidance, or seek medical attention where they normally go for medical attention if needed.

WHERE can I get more Information about COVID-19?

The province of British Columbia has created a phone service to provide non-medical information about COVID-19 which is available from 7:30 a.m. - 8 p.m. at 1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268-4319) or via text message at 604-630-0300.

More information on COVID-19 can also be found online:
- Vancouver Coastal Health [http://www.vch.ca/covid-19](http://www.vch.ca/covid-19)
- BC Centre for Disease Control [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19)
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Site Management

Goal: Modify daily operations and the physical environment to minimize the potential for COVID-19 to spread in the premises.

Considerations:

• Operate as a take-out or delivery service. All dining areas must be closed.
• Provide a supply of hand sanitizer at the entrance to the facility.
• If possible, prop inside doors open so staff, volunteers and the public do not have to touch handles. Do not prop outside doors open as it may create problems with pests.
• Consider simplifying meal preparation in order to assist with any potential reductions in staff/volunteers levels.
• Do not provide self-serve food to the public, have your staff/volunteers serve all foods.
• Provide individuals with single use utensils.
• Provide single-use condiments.
• Equip the site with additional cleaning supplies at various locations (spray sanitizer and paper towels) so staff/volunteers can wipe down surfaces at their own discretion.
• Consider developing specialized checklists staff and volunteers can use to evaluate COVID-19 measures being taken in the premises.
• Eliminate communal storage areas for staff/volunteers’ belongings, and instead provide separate sealable bins or lockers.
• Have goods delivered to a receiving area only, rather than the service/prep areas and to transfer goods using minimal handling (i.e. trolley).

For Meal Delivery Service:

• Consider increasing the number of meals provided to reduce the number of visits personnel need to make (e.g. if you typically provide 3-5 days of provisions, consider providing 1-2 weeks).
• Provide “drop at the door” service to avoid close contact with individuals that may be in isolation or symptomatic.
• Have premade packages ready for individuals/differing family sizes.
• Do not divide items into smaller packages and provide only unopened packages.
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Physical Distancing

Goal: To increase the space between people (staff, volunteers and the public) to eliminate potential transmission of the virus.

Considerations:
- Consider extending service hours to minimize the number of clients at one time.
- Monitor the number of people in the premises at any given time. Once the maximum number of persons is reached, allow one person in for every person that leaves.
- Use tape or ropes where crowds or line-ups normally form (e.g. building entrances, washrooms, food service areas) to prevent large gatherings of people.
- Control foot traffic patterns using cones and floor arrows.
- Separate in-coming and out-going clients if possible.
- Where possible, staff and volunteers should work more than 2 metres (6 feet) apart; use tape to delineate work areas.
- Install shields or barriers between close work stations (e.g. plexi-glass) where physical distancing requirements cannot be achieved.
- Increase floor space by removing unnecessary materials and/or equipment, especially in hallways and other high traffic areas.

Resources:
- Poster: Physical Distancing
- Video: Why do we need to socially distance?
COVID-19

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**Signage**

**Goal:** Use signs in staff/volunteer and public spaces to communicate important information about COVID-19.

**Considerations:**
- Place signs at entrances telling anyone entering not to enter if they are feeling ill.
- Post physical distancing signs in common areas.
- Post hand washing signs in washrooms and changing rooms.
- Ensure signs contain clear language that is easy to understand.
- When possible, use signs that include diagrams and pictures.

**Resources:**
- Poster: [Do Not Enter when Sick](#)
- Poster: [Coronavirus Prevention Poster](#)
- Poster: [Hand Washing Poster](#)
COVID-19 Tip Sheet for Community-Based Food Programs

Sanitation

Goal: Increase cleaning and disinfection of common touch points to prevent COVID-19 from spreading through contaminated surfaces.

Considerations:
- Washrooms must have liquid soap, paper towels and warm running water at all times.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas (door handles, faucets, bathrooms, handrails, chairs and tables).
- Create a checklist of all high-touch surfaces that must be cleaned, determine the frequency of cleaning and disinfection based on your facility’s needs.
- Record when cleaning and disinfection has occurred.
- Clean dirty surfaces with soap and water before disinfecting.
- Specialized disinfection products are not necessary, use regular disinfecting solutions found in your sanitation plan.
- Follow manufacturer’s instructions when using disinfectants.
- Consider having separate cleaning supplies for different areas of the facility.
- Provide multiple plastic lined waste containers to dispose of used tissues, wipes, gloves, and other cleaning materials.
- Make sure any person required to clean has received the appropriate training.

Resources:
- Health Canada approved disinfectants for COVID-19
- BCCDC: Information on bleach concentrations to inactivate COVID-19
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Staff/volunteer Sickness and Return to Work Policy

Goal: To maintain healthy staff and volunteers by ensuring anyone who is sick remains home for at least 10 days from the onset of symptoms and does not return to work until safe to do so.

Considerations:
- Develop a staff/volunteer illness plan that is communicated to everyone.
- Have staff/volunteers declare they are symptom-free when signing in for the day.
- Tell your staff/volunteers that if they are sick with any symptoms of respiratory illness consistent with cold, influenza or COVID-19, even if symptoms are mild, they must not work, remain at home, and contact Health Link BC at 8-1-1.
- If while at work, a staff/volunteer starts experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness consistent with COVID-19, even if symptoms are mild, ask the staff/volunteer to don a mask and to leave work immediately, go straight home, and have them contact their family physician/primary care provider or 8-1-1 for further guidance.
- Ensure that objects and surfaces touched by sick staff/volunteers are disinfected before being used by others.
- Sick staff/volunteers should use the BC COVID-19 self-assessment tool.
- Anyone with symptoms can now be assessed and receive a COVID-19 test.
- Testing is not recommended for people who do not have symptoms.
- If a staff/volunteer has a COVID-19 diagnosis, the local public health department will identify any co-workers who may have been exposed to the sick staff/volunteer.
- The employer and staff/volunteers should be reassured that if they haven’t been contacted by public health then there is no issue or concern that was identified by public health.

Resources:
- [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [Poster: COVID-19 Testing for all who Need It](#)
COVID-19
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Personal Hygiene & Training

Goal: Have all staff and volunteers practice diligent personal hygiene, and provide training so everyone understands how to protect themselves and their patrons from COVID-19.

IMPORTANT:
Frequent and proper handwashing is encouraged as the best way of preventing all viral respiratory infections and other foodborne illnesses. If a food premises chooses to use gloves, employees should wash their hands thoroughly before putting on the gloves. Change the gloves in between tasks (i.e. after cleaning, after handling garbage, before food handling, etc.). Wearing gloves does not exclude food handlers from washing their hands.

The use of masks for staff/volunteers is not mandatory unless normally required. Individuals who choose to wear a non-surgical mask must practice good personal hygiene when putting on and taking the mask off, ensure it is well-fitted, and avoid adjusting the mask while working in food prep or service areas. Masks should not be shared, and wearing a mask does not mean you can work while symptomatic.

Other Considerations:
- Everyone must wash their hands at the start of their shift, before eating or drinking, after touching shared items, after using the washroom, and before leaving.
- Everyone must follow cough and sneeze etiquette.
- Staff must not touch their face without first cleaning their hands.
- There should be no sharing of cigarettes or vaping equipment.
- Provide training about the virus so everyone knows how to minimize its spread.
- Staff/volunteer training should be done in small groups with social distancing.
- Consider providing electronic COVID-19 resources to all staff/volunteers.
- Communicate information in multiple languages.

Resources:
- VIDEO: Transmission of the COVID-19 coronavirus
- Translated training materials and signage
- Video: Cough & sneeze etiquette
- Video: Hand Washing

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