Workplace Health & Safety
COVID-19 Emerging and Preparedness Practices

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What recommendations are there for continuing operating procedures in the event that a volunteer or warehouse worker tests positive for COVID-19?

Updated 03.30.2020

If you have an employee or volunteer that test positive for COVID-19 you will need to immediately contact your local health department for guidance. The local health department will need to know who has had close contact with the COVID-19 positive person while they were at the food bank. It is important to note that COVID-19 is a respiratory virus and the main mode of transmission is through respiratory droplets (close personal contact) and not from touching inanimate objects such as food products. It is not necessary to recall or destroy food products that the worker may have handled.

All components of the food industry are considered critical infrastructure and it is therefore vital that they continue to operate. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19 that includes information on how a COVID-19 outbreak could affect workplaces and steps all employers can take to reduce workers’ risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19).

Food facilities need to follow protocols, including cleaning protocols, set by local and state health departments, which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in each area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission – not based on food safety.

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality about individual employees’ identities. Sick employees should follow the CDC’s What to do if you are
sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Employers should consult with their local health department for additional guidance.

CDC’s guidance for disinfecting your facility after having an employee test positive can be found here.

References


Can COVID-19 spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects?

Updated 03.15.2020

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not believed to be the main way the virus spreads.

Reference:


What disinfectants will be effective against coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Updated 03.15.2020
It is safe to assume to date that COVID-19 has similar virulence on surfaces as other human coronaviruses. This is a link to disinfectants that are effective on human coronavirus.

References


How do I maintain social distancing at my food bank or food pantry where staff and volunteers typically work within close distances?

Updated: 04.06.2020

To prevent spread of COVID-19, CDC is recommending individuals employ social distancing or maintaining approximately 6 feet from others, when possible. In food production/processing facilities and retail food establishments, an evaluation should be made to identify and implement operational changes that increase employee separation. However, social distancing to the full 6 feet will not be possible in some food facilities.

The risk of an employee transmitting COVID-19 to another is dependent on distance between employees, the duration of the exposure, and the effectiveness of employee hygiene practices and sanitation. When it's impractical for employees in these settings to maintain social distancing, effective hygiene practices should be maintained to reduce the chance of spreading the virus. Also, see Should Employees in retail food and food production settings wear face coverings to prevent exposure to COVID-19? (Posted April 4, 2020).

IMPORTANT: Maintaining social distancing in the absence of effective hygiene practices may not prevent the spread of this virus. Food facilities should be vigilant in their hygiene practices, including frequent and proper hand-washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces.

Because the intensity of the COVID-19 outbreak may differ according to geographic location, coordination with state and local officials is strongly encouraged for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside.

Sick employees should follow the CDC’s What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Reference

Should food bank employees and volunteers wear face coverings to prevent the exposure to COVID-19?

Updated: 04.06.2020

On April 3, the CDC released an updated recommendation regarding the use of cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19. CDC recommends the use of simple cloth face coverings as a voluntary public health measure in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies).

For workers in food production, processing, and retail type settings who do not typically wear masks as part of their jobs, consider the following if you choose to use a cloth face covering to slow the spread of COVID-19:

- Maintain face coverings in accordance with parameters in FDA’s Model Food Code sections 4-801.11 Clean Linens and 4.802.11 Specifications.
- Launder reusable face coverings before each daily use.
- CDC also has additional information on the use of face coverings, including washing instructions and information on how to make homemade face covers.

NOTE: The cloth face coverings recommended by CDC are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.

Reference


What steps can we take to protect volunteers and food safety protocols?

Updated 03/31/2020

We recommend you issue the same personal hygiene guidelines for volunteers as for employees.

Hand Washing

Require volunteers to wash hands upon entering the facility. Lead volunteers to handwashing facilities/stations before beginning a shift. Temporary handwashing stations can be set up per
the local health department recommendations (temporary food festival set up). Contact your local health department for guidance

**Sample hand washing guidance** for staff and volunteers to minimize exposure and infection risks during a pandemic can be found [here](#).

**Adjusting Volunteer Activities**
Food Banks have adapted their volunteer activities in several ways including pre-screening, changing shift times, lengths and sizes, taking temperature upon arrival, hand hygiene support, social distancing strategies and immediate dismissal for any symptoms. A more detailed outline on **guidance for food banks to adjust volunteer activities** during the COVID-19 pandemic to minimize exposure and infection risks can be found [here](#).

**Face Masks**
Disposable facemasks should be kept on-site and used only if someone (worker or attendee) becomes sick at the site. Those who become sick should be immediately isolated from staff and participants who are not sick and given a clean disposable facemask to wear.

*While this guidance was developed with information from multiple sources (e.g., network examples, subject matter experts, external health and safety organizations), food banks should consult local public health agencies, the CDC COVID-19 site, the Feeding America COVID-19 site for updates, or other sources as needed to adapt the recommendations for local implementation.*

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**What would trigger closing our facility to volunteers?**

*Updated 3/8/20*
Make sure to follow all your local/state health department’s guidelines. Food Lifeline in Seattle may serve as an example. After Seattle and King County Public Health officials encouraged businesses to allow employees to work remotely and issued guidelines for vulnerable populations to avoid crowds, Food Lifeline closed its facility to general volunteers in early March. As of 3/7/20, it is still hosting a small crew of production volunteers.

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**How are Food Banks determining volunteer eligibility and screening volunteers?**

*Updated 3/31/20*
Food Banks have been adopting new practices to assess and screen volunteers to minimize exposure and infection risk.
Many food banks are providing guidance on who can volunteer in their facility (for instance, only those in a certain age range, or specifying volunteers cannot show any symptoms of illness). **Recommendations for considering volunteer eligibility** for participating in onsite activities during a pandemic can be found [here](#).

Feeding America recommends pre-screening volunteers over the phone before they arrive to determine if they are eligible to volunteer. **Guidance for pre-screening volunteers** during a pandemic can be found [here](#).

*Food banks should assess local factors and other variables (e.g., volunteer needs, food bank capacity, etc.) and adopt recommendations that are most appropriate for their communities and needs. While this guidance was developed with information from multiple sources (e.g., network examples, subject matter experts, external health and safety organizations), food banks should consult local public health agencies, the CDC COVID-19 site, the Feeding America COVID-19 site for updates, or other sources as needed to adapt the recommendations for local implementation.*

**How are Food Banks communicating to volunteers about shelter-in-place recommendations?**

*Updated 3/31/20*

Some Food Banks are finding that some volunteers have been confused about what a Shelter-in-place order means about being able to volunteer. Communication that other Food Banks have adopted can be found below.

Two sample **volunteer shelter-in-place messages templates** can be found [here](#). *Thanks to the Lakeview Pantry in Chicago and Gleaners Food Bank.*

If required in your community, a **sample volunteer exemption template** can be found [here]. *Thanks to the Northern Illinois Food Bank*

**How can our food bank address the potential problem of receiving donated food products that are infused with marijuana (THC)?**

*Updated 04.09.2020*

Recently, a food bank reported receiving a donation of unsorted product that was passed on to an agency partner in alignment with established policy. The established protocol was for agency partners to sort and vet unsorted product from this donor according to food safety standards...
prior to distribution. Regrettably, THC-infused product with packaging that mimics Nerds candy was not identified by the agency’s volunteers prior to distribution to community residents.

For additional details, visit this HungerNet Network Advisory page.

Additionally, Feeding America recently updated and released this Network Advisory on Cannabis/Marijuana Edibles.

**What resources has Feeding America created to support food banks in keeping workplaces safe, protecting personnel, and preventing the spread of COVID-19?**

04.09.20

As part of our COVID-19 response, FANO has formed a Health and Safety work group consisting of members of FANO staff with public health backgrounds and national subject matter experts. Our goal is to 1) offer food banks customized guidance based on federal guidelines (CDC, OSHA, USDA, FDA and EPA) and to 2) share emerging practices to protect the health and safety of our members, partners, and clients.

This document is the first in a series that provides customized recommendations to food banks on how to respond to health and safety issues during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 Workplace Health and Safety Prevention Module contains 12 tip sheets on enhanced methods of personal, interpersonal, and workplace hygiene that are designed for food banks and their partners to display and share among staff and volunteers.

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**How should a food bank respond if a staff or volunteer becomes ill / symptomatic while onsite?**

04.10.20

If an individual (employee, volunteer, or visitor) becomes symptomatic onsite:

1. Identify and isolate the individual.
   a. **Symptoms** of COVID-19 to look out for are fever, shortness of breath, cough
b. Isolate by:
   i. Sending the individual home, with guidance to call a healthcare provider
   ii. If sending home is not immediately possible, isolate by sending the individual to a designated area with closeable doors until the individual can go home. This area should be as removed as possible from areas of the facility where others are working.
   iii. If possible, provide a face mask to the individual and ask them to wear it, if tolerated. WHO: how to wear a facemask
   iv. Restrict the number of people entering isolation areas, especially coming within 6 feet of symptomatic individuals.

2. After individual has left the site, thoroughly clean and disinfect the areas the individual had access to.

References:
- https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/

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**Can food bank staff / volunteers still work if they have been in contact with someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19?**

04.10.2020

The CDC has released interim guidance on implementing safety practices for essential workers (including food bank/pantry staff and volunteers) who may have had exposure to a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

CDC advises that critical infrastructure workers may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure to COVID-19, provided they remain asymptomatic and additional precautions are implemented to protect them and the community.

A potential exposure means being a household contact or having close contact within 6 feet of an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. The timeframe for having contact with an individual includes the period of time of 48 hours before the individual became symptomatic.

Critical Infrastructure workers who have had an exposure but remain asymptomatic should adhere to the following practices prior to and during their work shift:
• **Pre-Screen**: Employers should measure the employee’s temperature and assess symptoms prior to them starting work. Ideally, temperature checks should happen before the individual enters the facility.

• **Regular Monitoring**: As long as the employee doesn’t have a temperature or symptoms, they should self-monitor under the supervision of their employer’s occupational health program.

• **Wear a Mask**: The employee should wear a face mask at all times while in the workplace for 14 days after last exposure. Employers can issue facemasks or can approve employees’ supplied cloth face coverings in the event of shortages.

• **Social Distance**: The employee should maintain 6 feet and practice social distancing as work duties permit in the workplace.

• **Disinfect and Clean work spaces**: Clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment routinely.

If the employee becomes sick during the day, they should be sent home immediately. Surfaces in their workspace should be cleaned and disinfected.

For more information, visit the CDC Interim Guidance page, and note that the CDC is updating recommendations regularly. Feeding America will attempt to update information and resources on HungerNet to reflect the most up-to-date CDC recommendations and guidelines. Food banks should contact their Member Engagement Directors with specific questions, refer back to the CDC COVID-19 website, and be in communication with their local health departments for COVID-19 guidance.