

COVID-19 Recommendations for Emergency Food Providers

Recent efforts to slow the spread of [COVID-19](#) have had a significant impact on how emergency food programs operate. Recognizing the importance of ensuring these programs continue during this time of uncertainty, the Saskatchewan Health Authority 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 are experiencing symptoms, such as fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, [self-isolate](#) and call **HealthLine 811** or complete the online self-assessment. If you are not experiencing symptoms but have questions about COVID-19, go to www.saskatchewan.ca/COVID19.

Food Banks and Community Meal Programs/Soup Kitchens

Direction for staff and volunteers:

- If staff/volunteers are experiencing symptoms compatible with COVID-19 such as fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, they should immediately [self-isolate](#), call **HealthLine 811** to be assessed, complete the online [self-assessment](#) or call 911 if they are experiencing severe symptoms.
- If staff/volunteers are diagnosed with or under investigation for COVID-19, or 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 staff/volunteers have had close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, they are required to [self-isolate](#) for 14 days from the date of being exposed and are not permitted to attend the program, even if they are feeling well.
- If staff/volunteers have traveled outside of Saskatchewan but have not had contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19, they should [self-monitor](#) for symptoms.
- If staff/volunteers have been identified as non-close contacts to someone diagnosed with COVID-19, they should [self-monitor](#) for symptoms.
- Staff/Volunteers who are in self-isolation can still contribute to program efforts remotely. Consider asking them to participate in tasks from home, including scheduling, calling vulnerable community members to ensure that they are safe and have the resources they need, or sharing fundraising information through their networks.

Healthy People, Healthy Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Health Authority works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Saskatchewan as the traditional territory of First Nations and Métis People.

- Stress the importance of [handwashing](#) with warm water to staff/volunteers. Encourage them to do so often with soap and warm 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 alcohol-based [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, sore throat, or difficulty breathing/shortness of breath?
 - Have you travelled outside of Canada (including to the US) in the past 14 days?
 - Have you had close or prolonged 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 and remind them that they need to stay at home and [self-isolate](#).

- Provide services to patrons while they remain outside the facility and maintain [physical \(social\) distancing](#), with 2 metres (6 feet) between people. Remind patrons of the requirement to [self-isolate](#) as appropriate.
- Promote [physical \(social\) distancing](#) by using physical line controls, such as markers (e.g., tape, cones) every 2 metres (6 feet) as visible cues.
- Post highly visible [signage](#) that describes [physical \(social\) distancing](#) 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 using recommended environmental cleaning practices.
- Have premade packages/hampers ready in differing household sizes for quick distribution.
- Do not divide items into smaller packages and provide only unopened packages.
- Ensure sufficient workspace is provided to allow appropriate distancing between staff/volunteers and to prevent crowding.
- If you are aware of patrons who are unwell and do not have transportation, or are [self-isolating](#), consider providing the services in other ways, such as delivering food to patrons’ homes.
- To avoid crowding and to support [physical \(social\) distancing](#), try to schedule appointments with individuals wishing to pick up or drop off items.
- Limit gatherings of people in lines and waiting areas as much as possible. Gatherings cannot exceed 10 people in a single area, and ensure people are able to maintain [physical \(social\) distancing](#), staying at least 2 metres (6 feet) apart, while waiting.

- 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](#).

Additional Considerations for Community Meal Programs/Soup Kitchens

- To avoid large gatherings of people, use 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 and time of day 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.
- There has been no evidence of transmission of COVID-19 through food. 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 [physical \(social\) distancing](#) and/or ask for donations to be placed outside for pick up.
 - Make hand sanitizer (70% alcohol) available for donor use before donations are transferred at your program.
 - Ask donors who are sick to stay at home and to consider providing donations after their [self-isolation](#) period is over.

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

General Information on what you can do to protect yourself:

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm 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.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Practice [physical \(social\) distancing](#) - maintain a distance of 2 meters (6 feet) between yourself and others.

Delivering Food

- Only paper bags should be used for delivering meals.
- Reusable meal delivery bags should not be used, until further notice.
- Before delivering food to client, staff/volunteers should clean their hands using hand sanitizer containing at least 70% alcohol.
- Contact clients in advance to schedule a delivery/pick up as much as possible.
- Drop off food at a pre-arranged location (i.e., call the home to arrange a time and phone to confirm receipt).
- Return to vehicle and clean hands again with hand sanitizer.
- Staff/volunteers who are delivering food items should avoid entering homes and maintain recommended 2 metre (6 feet) [physical \(social\) distance](#).

Face Masks

- Wearing a non-medical mask (for example, a homemade cloth mask) in the community has not been proven to protect the person wearing it. Strict hygiene and public health measures, including frequent hand washing and [physical \(social\) distancing](#), will reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus.
- If you decide to wear a non-medical mask to protect others around you, remember not to touch the mask or rub your eyes.
- Non-medical masks have limitations and need to be used safely.
- If you choose to use a non-medical mask:
 - Wash your hands immediately before putting it on and immediately after taking it off, in addition to practicing good hand hygiene while wearing it.
 - It should fit well, without any spots that gape open.
 - Do not share it with others.
- Face masks can be contaminated on the outside or when touched by your hands. When wearing a face mask, take the following precautions to protect yourself:
 - Avoid touching your face while using it
 - Change a cloth mask as soon as it gets damp or soiled
 - Put it directly into the washing machine or a bag that can be emptied into the washing machine then disposed of
 - Cloth masks can be laundered with other items using a hot cycle, and then dried thoroughly in a dryer
 - Non-medical masks that cannot be washed should be discarded and replaced as soon as they get damp, soiled or crumpled
 - Dispose of masks in a garbage bin with a bag in it (not an empty bin that gets dumped)
 - Do not leave discarded masks in shopping carts, on the ground, etc.

Non-medical masks alone will not prevent the spread of covid-19. You must consistently and strictly adhere to frequent hand washing and [physical \(social\) distancing](#).

For more information, regularly check the Government of Saskatchewan COVID-19 website as information changes often:

www.saskatchewan.ca/covid19

References

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Current as of April 8th, 2020. Adapted with permission from North Bay Parry Sound Health District, Chatham-Kent Public Health and Grey-Bruce Public Health.