

FeedMore COVID-19 FAQ's

How is FeedMore making decisions?

An interdepartmental task force was formed at FeedMore WNY to monitor the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and developing plans to ensure the safety and viability of our food supply while ensuring that we are able to continue to fulfill our mission to provide nutritious food to our neighbors in need. This group is in touch with Federal, State, and local government officials and constantly monitoring new rules and regulations, best practices, and concerns across the county.

What is FeedMore doing internally to ensure that food from the warehouse and commissary is safe?

New practices have been implemented to ensure that staff, volunteers and suppliers are healthy and follow safe hygiene practices. We are limiting staff and volunteer involvement in certain activities to minimize potential exposure and have plans in place to regularly sanitize critical control points of our operation. Plans are in place to address any potential staff or volunteer exposure. Rest assured that we are maintaining the highest standards when it comes to our food preparation and distribution.

How can my program help?

It is imperative that you remember all FeedMore WNY resources, including equipment, products, food obtained through FeedMore WNY or retail partnerships, are to only be used for your approved program operation. Unless further authorization is granted to FeedMore by our federal, state, and local governments, and then communicated directly to you in writing, your programs must operate within the approved services according to your agency agreement. If you are approached by a government, school or other entity that is requesting assistance, please have them call us at FeedMore WNY so we can work within currently plans and allocate resources appropriately.

What other regulations does our organization fall under?

Emergency Food Relief Organizations (EFRO), which include Food Pantries, Soup Kitchens, and Shelters must abide by the policies of their regulatory bodies. If regulations are unclear they should refer to their local health department (city, town, county, state) for guidance.

Can we pre-screen clients to determine if they are potential carriers of the Coronavirus?

HPNAP funded EFROs may not require individuals to ask COVID-19 screening questions as a condition to receiving emergency food. Any process that is designed to facilitate screenings must be separated from the process of securing food assistance. This means that people can volunteer or agree to be screened after receiving food assistance without a connection to their food support. Agencies should refer all of these types of Coronavirus screening questions to local (county) health Departments.

What can we do to protect our staff and volunteers?

Agency staff should be using personal protection measures before, during, and after servicing clients, along with employing good hygiene measures. Feeding America is recommending EFRO staff apply as many "No or Low client contact service measures" as possible. For example, where a pantry may routinely offer client choice, until the State Of Emergency is lifted, give out prepackaged meals; so long as the contents meet HPNAP minimum requirements.

What are some recommendations for practices that we may be able to use to assist clients and limit the spread of the Coronavirus?

Food Pantries:

- a.) Pre-packed bags are a great option to provide to clients to limit contact. This can shorten the congregation of individuals and allow you to potentially pass out bags out a door. You can also consider alternative delivery systems such as a drive through distributions where food is brought to a client's car, or home delivery of products if you have the capacity.
- b.) We recommend using the HPNAP 3-Day Pantry Bag Guide to create shelf-stable pre-packed bags for distribution to clients. You can supplement these bags with fresh/perishable products that you may receive as well.
- c.) BE GENEROUS with the food you provide and consider increasing your minimum service policy. You may also be experiencing more clients from outside your service area or that are new to the network coming to your agency – please be sure to follow standard operation procedures when providing them food for their first visit and referring them to the agency that services where they reside.
- d.) Ask sick clients to stay home and work with pantry staff to delegate a friend or neighbor pick up their groceries.
- e.) Consider extending hours or open additional days so clients are spread out and to limit crowds.
- f.) Limit the number of clients and volunteers in the food pantry.
- g.) If pantry has an appointment system, consider allowing fewer people for each appointment time and add additional appointment times so you can sanitize in between.
- h.) Consider having your volunteers work in shifts to limit contact – potentially have a crew come in on non-service days to pack bags and then have a crew come in that may be less vulnerable come in on the regularly scheduled service days to hand out the bags.
- i.) Documentation: your agency is still obligated to register new clients and keep records of clients that have come to your agency. However, to keep crowds from forming and limit exposure, your agency will not be required to have clients sign in. We recommend that one staff/volunteer record the names of clients, household addresses, and number in household. Client files can be updated with the notation, "Coronavirus – Verbal Attestation" or "COVID-19 Verbal Attestation" and the volunteer initials.

Soup Kitchens:

- a.) To ensure proper sanitation and limiting exposures, it is advisable for soup kitchens to review their sanitation procedures to ensure that all food contact surfaces are thoroughly cleaned and sanitized regularly and whenever exposed to potential contamination. This would include more frequently cleaning and sanitizing of surfaces and regularly touched areas (doors, tray lines, tables, chairs, etc.).
- b.) Volunteers or staff should be handing the clients utensils and not allowing for utensils, napkins, plates, etc. to be exposed out in the open for anyone to touch. If possible, volunteers should pre-wrap utensils in a napkin and handing to clients.

c.) Consider providing clients the option of taking out their meals from the dining area. This may include:

i. Having staff/volunteers put food items directly into take out containers for distribution

ii. If a client brings in their own take out container, serve the meal on your regular plate service and allow the client to transfer the meal to their own container. Never put food directly into a container that a client may have provided.

d.) Remember to sanitize surfaces regularly and between uses

e.) Remember that soup kitchens need to operate under 50% seating capacity and social distancing should be encourage by reducing the numbers of tables and chairs.

Mobile Pantry Program:

This program is critical for distributing nutrition into the community. Our goal is to continue all mobile pantry distributions. Some small changes that can be made to the program that will minimize crowds include:

a.) Consider a number system that will allow clients to sign in and then be called up by numbers of 10. This will allow client to disperse while waiting for their number to be called.

b.) Advise clients to show up later than the scheduled start time of the distribution to spread out the service and minimize crowds at the site.

c.) Volunteers can prepack product provided ahead of time to streamline distribution.

d.) Documentation: we recommend that one staff/volunteer record the names of clients, household addresses, and number in household – clients can verbally attest to eligibility. Please notate at the top of the sign in sheet “Coronavirus – Verbal Attestations.”

e.) We recommend utilizing disposables gloves while handling product. We will provide these items as much as possible.

What should our agency do if we are running out of food?

Please contact FeedMore if you are running low on supplies. We understand that products and services from other organizations, such as grocery stores, may run out or be limited. Note that at the core of our operation is distributing food, and we will dedicate all our efforts to keep this service going through this crisis. Plans are in place to address many scenarios that may arise.

Should we be concerned about a shortage of food?

We are maintaining contact with our vendors to ensure that supplies remain in the pipeline and available. Please be sure that your food is properly secured in an area to keep it safe from contamination, tampering, and possible theft. With restrictions on food purchases at local stores a possibility, stealing food may be a real concern, so please be vigilant with access to food storage areas.

What if an area becomes quarantined or “contained?”

We are working with our Federal, State, and local governments on plans to get food into communities that may be quarantined or “contained.”

Are products safe from China?

According to the CDC, Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with imported goods and there have not been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods. In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures. Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread most often by respiratory droplets.

Is there any concern with the virus and prepared foods?

According to the CDC, currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food. Before preparing or eating food it is important to always wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds for general food safety. Throughout the day wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing, or going to the bathroom.

Are Soup Kitchens required to close?

No. We have been advised by the NYS DOH that due to the population that is being serviced by these critical organizations, soup kitchens can still dine-in; however, they should support social distancing through removing of tables or chairs, having clients sit a recommended three feet away from each other, and ensure that you do not exceed more than the 50% of the occupancy level as reported on your permit.

What about school children?

Please check in with your school district to see if they are providing school lunches. Many districts are still offering school lunches as take outs along with a breakfast for the following day.

Are cloth bags allowable?

Since the virus does not last long outside a host, cloth bags are perfectly acceptable to use – just remember to practice good hygiene, so if a client provides a reusable bag, please get the items first, then pack the bag, hand it to the client, and wash your hands and disinfect the area where the bag was. If you touch the bag ahead of time to bring it inside, wash your hands PRIOR to touching any other products to reduce the possibility of cross-contamination.