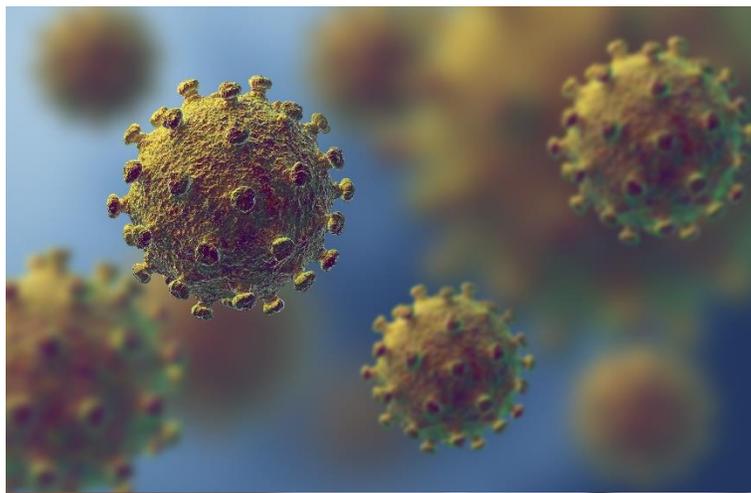


Renfrew County and  
District Health Unit

# FACT SHEET

## Recommendations for Emergency Food Providers



### What is COVID-19?

The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) infects the respiratory system. You may have few to no symptoms or may mistake the symptoms for having a cold or flu. Symptoms such as fever, cough, difficulty breathing and pneumonia may appear up to 14 days after exposure to COVID-19. For more information, visit the Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) [website](#).

COVID-19 is most commonly spread by an infected person through:

- Droplets from coughing, sneezing or talking.
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands.
- Contact with an infected surface or object. Early research suggests the virus could live on surfaces for several days.<sup>1</sup>

### Reducing the spread:

Careful hand hygiene and attention to physical (social) distancing can help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**Please post signage in your facility** (see the links below) so that staff, volunteers, and patrons know the correct steps to take for:

- [Handwashing](#)
- [Hand sanitizing](#)
- [Cough etiquette and other precautions](#)
- [Practicing physical \(social\) distancing](#)

Resources: [RCDHU](#)

[Public Health Agency of Canada](#)

<sup>1</sup> N van Doremalen, et al. Aerosol and surface stability of HCoV-19 (SARS-CoV-2) compared to SARS-CoV-1. The New England Journal of Medicine. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMc2004973 (2020).

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## Recommendations for Emergency Food Providers

COVID-19 has affected how food banks, soup kitchens and other community meal programs run. Recognizing the importance of ensuring these programs continue during this time of uncertainty, the Health Unit asks programs to use the following recommendations to help protect staff, volunteers and patrons while continuing to operate.

## Food Banks and Community Meal Programs/Soup Kitchens

### Operating suggestions:

- 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 volunteers maintain [physical \(social\) distancing](#) with two metres between people when they are working.
- Post highly visible signage that states the above at each entrance. Ensure staff, volunteers and patrons are aware of these recommendations.
- Ask patrons to not attend the program if they are feeling sick or unwell.
- Increase on-site cleaning, especially in high traffic areas and on high touch surfaces such as tables, counters, handles, doorknobs and handrails. Sanitize all areas with an approved [sanitizer](#) between each patron. Follow manufacturer's instructions on use.
- 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. Ensure people can stay at least 2 metres apart, if waiting. Set up pylons, chairs or use coloured tape to outline the spacing.
- 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.
- Schedule pick-up times and consider having people stagger their arrivals. Is it feasible to stage drive-up distribution? This would keep patrons from needing to leave their vehicles to receive pre-bagged groceries.
- Can you increase the amount of food you provide to patrons? This would reduce the number of visits that people need to make to your program and others in the community, and help patrons who must [self-isolate](#).
- Ensure handwashing sinks and approved hand sanitizer (70% alcohol) are available.

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## 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 a patron is picking up a meal, limit the contact between volunteers doing food preparation and patron.
- Use single-use, disposable cups, plates, bowls and cutlery only for all aspects of meal service.
- Any food that leaves the kitchen should not come back to the kitchen.
- If meals are being distributed hot, they should be eaten as soon as possible, or refrigerated.
- Label meals with the date it was prepared, the organization name and a best before date.
- Provide instructions on how to reheat safely.

### Receiving Donations

- Ask for cash donations 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 [physical 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.

Emergency food programs will have their own way to adjust services for COVID-19. Contact the Health Unit for support with deciding what works best for your program, while keeping everyone as healthy as possible.

### For more information:

To speak with a public health inspector, contact the Health Unit at 613-735-8654.

- [rcdhu.com](http://rcdhu.com)
- [ontario.ca/coronavirus](http://ontario.ca/coronavirus)
- [canada.ca/coronavirus](http://canada.ca/coronavirus)

Current as of March 27, 2020. Adapted with permission from Chatham-Kent Public Health Unit, Grey Bruce Health Unit and North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit.

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