

COVID-19 Food Handling Guidance for Restaurants, Food Pantries, and Non-profit Food Distribution Sites

March 17, 2020

COVID-19 is spread from person to person – including between restaurant employees and customers. The virus mainly spreads through respiratory droplets coughed or sneezed by infected people. Older adults and people with chronic medical conditions, such as those with diabetes, heart conditions, and lung conditions, are at greater risk of becoming very sick if they contract COVID-19.

On March 16, 2020, Governor Hogan issued an executive order to close all restaurants and bars that do not have carryout, drive-thru or delivery services. For those that do offer carryout, on-site consumption is prohibited. Customers are not permitted to sit in dining areas while waiting for food delivery orders. Facilities that are operating with salad bars and buffets should voluntarily discontinue salad bar and buffet operations.

Guidance for Restaurant Employees

Restaurant employees can protect themselves and the public by:

- Practicing and promoting social distancing, which means sitting or standing at least 6 feet away from other people, including in kitchen and prep areas.
- Continuing to practice existing employee health and food safety procedures, with increased handwashing and proper handwashing: washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and using single use paper towels for drying. If a food facility runs out of soap, then they may not operate and must close until soap is provided. Sanitizer is not a substitute for soap in a food service setting.
- Staying home if sick, especially if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Symptoms include:
 - Fever
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath
- Coughing or sneezing into a tissue, if available, or into an upper sleeve – but not into hands, and washing hands after sneezing or coughing.

Guidance for Restaurant Employers

Restaurants can protect their workers and the public by:

- Following all of the guidance above and:
- In addition to practicing existing employee health and food safety procedures, conducting additional routine cleaning of all surfaces that employees and carryout customers contact, including doorknobs, counters



and other work surfaces. Normal cleaning supplies can be used in keeping with the instructions on the label.

- Providing alcohol-based hand sanitizers and extra napkins/tissues for customers to use.
- Printing posters available on CDC.gov to encourage proper hand washing.
- Actively encouraging sick employees to stay home and not allowing staff who have symptoms of COVID-19 to come in to work. Symptoms include:
 - Fever
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath
- Promoting sick leave policies that are consistent with public health guidance. Employees may also need to stay home to care for sick family members – restaurant management should recognize this new responsibility.

Guidance for Non-profit and Food Pantry Staff and Volunteers

Volunteers preparing foods should follow all safe food handling guidelines (see *General Food Safety Guidelines* section) and should not handle food if they show any signs of illness.

Do not allow staff or volunteers who have symptoms of COVID-19 to come in to work or to participate. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Facilitate good hand hygiene for meal preparers, servers, and participants by:

- Practicing existing health and food safety procedures, with increased handwashing and proper handwashing: washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and using single use paper towels for drying for all staff, volunteers, and participants during on-site meal distribution
- Providing alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol for participants receiving pre-packaged food and staff and volunteers facilitating take-out and delivery service
- Conducting additional routine cleaning of all surfaces that staff, volunteers, and participants contact, including doorknobs, counters and other surfaces.
- Practicing social distancing social distancing, which means sitting or standing at least 6 feet away from other people, including in kitchen and prep areas.

Changes to service at food pantries and non-profit food distribution sites

Alternative methods of providing meal service include:

- Home delivery of meals
 - Foods that are to be delivered hot or cold shall be placed in a cooler or insulated bag to maintain proper temperatures. Foods shall be held at the proper temperatures prior to being placed in the cooler and/or insulated bag
 - Hot food held above 135 °F

- Cold foods held below 41 °F
- Drive through meal distribution
- Take-out meal distribution

Stagger take-out and drive through meal distribution when possible to avoid gathering large numbers of people together. Practice social distancing of at least 6 feet between staff, volunteers, and participants when waiting for, receiving, or distributing meals. When delivering meals, do not enter participants' homes – leave the packaged meal outside for the recipient to take.

General Food Safety Guidelines

- All Potentially hazardous food must be cold held, cooked, hot held & reheated at proper temperature levels
 - Cold foods held at 41 °F or below
 - Hot food held at 135 °F or above
 - Reheated food should be cooked to 165 °F or above
 - Poultry cooked to 165 °F for 15 seconds
 - Beef cooked to 155 °F for 15 seconds
 - Pork cooked to 155 °F for 15 seconds
 - Eggs, fish, seafood, vegetables and any other food products cooked to 145 °F for 15 seconds
- Food handlers must use proper food handling procedures at all times
 - All food must be protected from contamination at all times
 - Keep all raw meats/seafood separated from cooked food
 - Follow proper handwashing procedures: washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and using single use paper towels for drying.
 - All food and drink (including water) must come from approved sources.
 - All uncovered food must be elevated at least 18 inches off of the ground.
 - All covered food should be elevated at least 6 inches off of the ground to avoid contamination
 - All food must be protected by a sneeze guard (wrapped, covered, etc.)
- Insect and rodent control must be maintained.
- Employees must practice good hygienic procedures.
 - Keep clothes clean.
 - No bare hand contact with foods.
 - Use utensils, tongs, or plastic gloves whenever handling food. Clean these utensils often.
 - Never handle food with dirty hands. Always wash your hands after using the toilet, smoking, eating, before handling food and whenever soiled.
 - Do not eat or drink while handling foods.
 - Food handlers must wear hair restraints (hats, hair nets, etc.).

**For further guidance, please review the Code of Maryland Regulations,
Title 10, Subtitle 15 (COMAR 10.15.03) and Baltimore City Health Code, Title 6**

*For more information on COVID-19, visit Baltimore City Health Department's website:
<https://health.baltimorecity.gov/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>.*