

COVID-19: GUIDANCE FOR FOOD BANKS/FOOD DONATION CENTRES

This document provides general guidance on the prevention and management of COVID-19 for essential businesses that support the provision of food, shelter, safety or protection, and/or social services and other necessities of life to economically disadvantaged and other vulnerable individuals. The businesses and organizations that are considered [essential services](#) include but are not limited to food banks, violence against women emergency shelters, homeless shelters, community housing, supportive housing, children's aid societies, residential services for adults and/or children with developmental disabilities, and custody and detention programs for young persons in conflict with the law.

In York Region, many of the food access programs that are currently operating can be found on the [York Region Food Network's \(YRFN\)](#) website. YRFN is the regional hub for the promotion of food security, fostering collaborations and partnerships to create a healthy, accessible and sustainable food system in York Region.

As the COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly, this guidance is subject to change. Please visit york.ca/covid19 regularly for updates and additional guidance.

Food banks/food donation centres should continue to operate and receive items and financial donations from community members during this time. Financial donations allow food banks to look for discounts and purchase healthy and nutritious foods, including perishables.

Considerations for Food Banks and Food Donation Centre Operators

- Create a plan to reduce or eliminate roles in client-facing positions for employees and volunteers who might have a higher risk of illness or complications if they acquire COVID-19. People at higher risk include seniors, those with underlying health conditions and those who are immunocompromised
- Implement a training plan for your staff on COVID-19 and include risk reduction and general prevention measures. Communicate this plan to them as it could help reduce concerns and help avoid additional staff shortages due to fear of exposure
- Regularly communicate with staff/volunteers and clients on prevention instructions and public health updates:
 - Describe what actions you are taking to protect them
 - Answer questions and explain what they can do to protect themselves and clients
 - Consider having communication boards in various areas where current information can be posted for everyone to see and still safely maintain two metre physical distancing from one another. Provide staff/volunteer updates at the beginning of shifts when new information becomes available

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675
TTY 1-866-512-6228
york.ca/covid19



Staff, volunteers and clients may experience increased levels of stress and mental health challenges during this time. To help them manage and cope, provide individuals with community supports and resources such as:

- A list of [mental health supports for adults](#) available on the Ministry of Health website
- A list of [mental health supports for children](#) available on the Ministry of Health website
- The [Taking Care of Your Mental Health poster which can be placed](#) in visible areas around the setting

General Prevention

Encourage good [infection prevention and control practices](#) to help reduce risk of acute respiratory illnesses (including COVID-19).

- Post [Hand Washing](#) and [Hand Sanitizing](#) posters in visible locations around the setting
- Remind staff to avoid touching their face especially mouth, nose and eyes with unclean hands
- Ensure liquid hand soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers are available, monitored and well-supplied
 - Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer stations for clients at the entrance and throughout the premises (if possible)
 - Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer to frontline staff who are unable to wash their hands frequently with soap and water
 - Offer supervised hand hygiene for clients (e.g., have a staff member pump alcohol-based hand sanitizer into client's hands as they enter the setting)
- Wear a mask: effective Friday, July 17, 2020, business owners and operators in York Region must have a [policy](#) in place to prohibit people from entering if they are not wearing a face mask or covering. Customers, employees and visitors who enter enclosed public spaces must wear a face mask or covering
 - Post mandatory [face covering / mask signage](#)
- Ask all staff, volunteers and clients to engage in good respiratory etiquette (e.g., cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze with a tissue, or cough or sneeze into the bend of their elbow and not their hand)
 - Post [Cover Your Cough or Sneeze](#) posters in visible locations around the setting(s)
 - When physical distancing of 2-metres is difficult, staff/volunteers or clients may consider wearing a non-medical mask or face covering to reduce the spread of their own respiratory droplets. Visit york.ca/covid19 to learn more about face coverings and face masks
 - Enhance [cleaning and disinfecting measures](#) of high traffic and frequently touched surfaces

COVID-19 and Perishable Food Recovery

Some foods, like fresh fruits and vegetables, milk and various meats, are displayed to customers and then redistributed to food banks for immediate donation to clients. In these instances, we encourage food banks and donations centres to consider the following:

- To date, there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 being spread through food.
- Lower the risk of infection and kill the virus that causes COVID-19 by following safe food handling and cooking practices:
 - Use common cleaning and disinfection methods to kill coronaviruses

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food and food packaging. If you do not have running water, use one of the approved hand sanitizers
- Wash your fruits and vegetables under potable running water
- Washing fresh produce with soap, chlorine or other chemicals is not recommended. Fresh produce is porous and can absorb chemicals that are not intended for you to eat
- Cook your food to recommended safe internal temperatures. Coronaviruses are killed by normal cooking temperatures
- Avoid cross-contamination of raw and ready-to-eat or cooked foods
- Disinfect any surfaces that will come in contact with food
- The [Home Food Safety Guide](#) explains safe food handling practices that can reduce the risk of food-borne illness.

Reduce the Risk of Transmission during Activities

Advise clients, staff, volunteers and other partners to not visit the centre if they are sick. If clients, staff, volunteers, etc. are symptomatic, they should stay home, contact their primary health care provider, or York Region Public Health (1-800-361-5653) and seek assessment at a COVID-19 assessment centre.

- Conduct screening to ensure staff, volunteers and clients are not sick:
 - If you have a phone line, ask staff, volunteers and clients to call prior to their shift/visit and screen them or have a recorded screening message
 - Actively encourage sick staff, volunteers and clients to stay home/not visit the centre
 - Ask people who have any symptoms of respiratory illness to contact their primary health care provider or York Region Public Health (1-800-361-5653) (1-877-797-0000) and seek assessment at a COVID-19 assessment centre
 - Arrangements for drop off deliveries should be made for sick clients to ensure they remain self-isolated
 - If screening occurs in-person, ensure [infection and control prevention guidelines](#) are in place to reduce the risk of transmission:
 - Maintain physical distancing of two metres (six feet)
 - Strategic table placement where possible, with masks and alcohol-based hand sanitizer, garbage receptacle away from the screener/greeter and direct person to clean hands and don a mask as necessary
- Staff/volunteers that have travelled outside of Canada, including the United States, must stay home and [self-isolate](#) for 14 days after returning to Canada
- [Physical distancing](#) should be maintained for all staff, volunteers, clients and individuals in the room at all times. Limit or restrict the number of clients within the food bank setting
- Avoid scheduling large volunteer groups from attending the food donation centre at the same time
- Ensure sufficient workspace and pick up locations to allow for appropriate distancing (two metres) between volunteers/staff and to prevent crowding or individuals from grouping together
- Ensure sufficient space during breaks and within the lunchrooms that allows for appropriate physical distancing (two metres or six feet) between volunteers and staff. Consider staggering break times to prevent crowding or individuals from grouping together

- To avoid crowding and to ensure physical distancing during pick-up or drop-off times, organizations should consider the following strategies:
 - Use markings along the sidewalk (e.g., tape or cones) to ensure two metre (six feet) spacing and visible waiting areas between clients where practical
 - Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer to clients while waiting in line
 - Offer services at staggered times and extend the service times to reduce crowding
 - Inquire if closed community sites can be used to distribute meals
 - Consider scheduling appointments (e.g., to pick up hampers, drop off donations) to avoid large groups or crowds for individuals
 - If outdoors and physical distancing of 2 metres is difficult, staff/volunteers or clients may consider wearing a non-medical mask or face covering to reduce the spread of their own respiratory droplets. Visit york.ca/covid19 to learn more about face coverings and face masks.
- Ensure that hampers are cleaned and sanitized prior to pick up

Enhanced Environmental Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Ensure environmental cleaning and disinfection is performed on a routine and consistent basis (consider a schedule). This also needs to be discussed with any contracted cleaning company/agency. Consideration for the following should be made:
 - Attempt to have additional cleaning supplies on site. Commonly used (household) [cleaners and disinfectants](#) are effective against COVID-19
 - Surfaces that have frequent contact with hands should be cleaned and disinfected twice per day and when visibly dirty. Examples include:
 - Frequently touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, light switches, counters, handrails, elevator buttons, touch screen surfaces and keypads)
 - Common areas (e.g., dining rooms, sleeping quarters, bathrooms)
 - Shared equipment (e.g., telephones, computer keyboard, tablets, walkie-talkies)
 - Consider all surfaces being frequently touched as contaminated. Start at the cleanest part of the equipment or surface and move towards the dirtiest
- Use only [disinfectants](#) that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an 8 digit number given by Health Canada that confirms it is approved for use in Canada
 - Store all disinfectants in a safe place accessible to staff and volunteers only
 - Check the expiry date of products you use and always follow manufacturer's instructions
 - Safety precautions and required personal protective equipment (e.g. eye protection, masks, and gloves) should be used according to the product instructions
 - Refer to Health Canada's [Drug Product Database online query](#) to search by product name, active ingredient, company etc.
 - Refer to York Region Public Health's [proper cleaning and disinfection practices](#) poster for more information
- Ensure manufacturer recommended wet-contact time is achieved
 - Wet-contact time is the minimum time required for items to be in contact with the disinfectant to ensure germs and viruses are killed
- Place equipment on a clean surface to air dry. Do not actively dry with a cloth towel or other device which is not a single use item
- Clean and disinfect all non-critical equipment and environmental surfaces between client use (e.g. shared equipment, treatment surfaces such as mats, platforms and tables)

Precautions to Reduce the Risk of Infection during Deliveries

- Ensure hands are washed prior to pre-bagging or boxing donations into smaller/lighter packages for easier delivery and carrying
- Staff/volunteers who are making deliveries to apartments and homes should call ahead, arrange for a delivery time and take the following precautions to protect themselves and their clients:
 - Deliver packages for clients at their front door without entering their home to limit contact
 - Practice [physical distancing](#) by maintaining a two metre (six feet) distance between people
 - Avoid shaking hands; use non-physical forms of contact for greeting
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- If staff/volunteer must enter a client's home:
 - Avoid touching surfaces in the client's home
 - Maintain two metre (six feet) of distance between anybody in the home
 - If clients are required to sign for parcels or deliveries, consider paperless options such as using text or email confirmations to avoid unnecessary close contact
 - Staff/volunteers should use an [alcohol-based hand sanitizer](#) immediately before and after the delivery
 - When physical distancing of 2 metres is difficult, staff/volunteers may consider wearing a non-medical mask or face covering to reduce the spread of their own respiratory droplets and to help protect vulnerable clients. In some cases, a client may prefer that staff/volunteers wear a face covering before entering. Visit york.ca/covid19 to learn more about face coverings and face masks

More Information

For more information, visit our website at york.ca/covid19 or call us at 1-800-361-5653.

References

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