

For Wisconsin Operators of the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

Food Pantry Protocols for Operating during Coronavirus COVID-19

Updated June 1, 2020; replaces “Food Pantry Checklist for Coronavirus COVID-19,” March 20, 2020

DATA COLLECTION AND ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES (two-sided form for use through September 30th)

To simplify your work, TEFAP has a replacement form for pantry recordkeeping during the outbreak. Use it for both continuing AND new households until further notice. The two-sided tool has

- New eligibility guide that show WEEKLY income limits along with monthly and annual (300% of the federal poverty level until further notice); and
- New data collection tool to capture ALL REQUIRED INFORMATION from each household so you can suspend using of individual household records during the outbreak. (See tool for instructions.) If pick-up is by proxy, view the proxy’s ID and record the *destination* household name, address and household size. You don’t need to collect proxy names.

WORKFORCE STRATEGIES

- Follow advice from public health experts.** Handwashing and sanitation in food distribution is crucial. Continually sterilize exchange points (doorknobs, service counters, bathrooms) and avoid unnecessary physical contact within the pantry. Practice social distancing with a minimum of 6’ between volunteers and with participants and wear a face covering or mask while at the pantry. Do not share food, lunch or snacks. Dispose of empty drinking bottles. Disposable gloves are recommended; dispose and re-glove after bathroom breaks; re-entering the pantry from outside. Avoid touching your face.
- Create and post a pantry “sick policy” for volunteers.** The message is simple: PLEASE DON’T VOLUNTEER IN THE PANTRY IF YOU ARE SICK OR ARE LIVING WITH SOMEONE WHO IS. Remind volunteers regularly. Ask for swift notice from volunteers if they exhibit symptoms (coughing, sneezing, and fever), become sick, have had large-scale social contact at an event or have been traveling. Do not return before the medically-advised window for self-isolation. Volunteers who had large-scale social contact – with symptoms or not – should also avoid the pantry for the self-quarantine period recommended by experts.
- Remind participants that if they become ill, they should send a proxy to the pantry for their food.** Check proxy designations to be sure they are up-to-date. Flag participants with no proxy and consider what options (if any) you might have to get food to someone homebound who has no proxy. You may find volunteers who will make deliveries to homebound individuals. Make sure that volunteer drivers do so at their own expense and risk, which includes insurance liability.
- Assess your pantry’s labor capacity.** Are there enough “back-up” volunteers to maintain the pantry’s service hours if your team is reduced? This may include operating trucks, trailers, forklifts, pallet jacks, hand trucks, loading and unloading, lifting, making runs to pick up food from Kwik Trip, Walmart and other suppliers) Do you coverage for essential functions? If not, consider reassigning volunteers. If pre-packaging requires you adjust distribution hours to make it manageable, you can adjust, with CLEAR PUBLIC NOTICE including but not limited to the pantry’s phone message, door posting, and social media.
- Making your assigned pick-ups from big box stores is an essential function to keep food flowing to your food bank partners. Please do not cease Walmart, Target, Kwik Trip and other pick-ups unless forced.** Should this happen, immediately contact your food bank and talk about alternatives.

- Pantries can continue to accept food donations** if unless they have the workforce, space and protective gear and sanitizing considerations to process, sort and store them. Volunteer should either wear gloves or wait at least 24 hours from the time they receive donated foods before handling and sorting them.
- Agree that vulnerable volunteers will take a sabbatical.** Volunteers age 70 and older, those with chronic health conditions and those caring for vulnerable or sick family members or friends should avoid interpersonal contact with the public. Talk with volunteers about safeguarding their own health. **Insist this is a priority for all.**

FOOD DISTRIBUTION STRATEGIES

Since last week, COVID-19 has been declared a worldwide pandemic. Both federal and state governments have declared a State of Emergency, and the “safe” crowd size is no longer relevant. **We can’t continue practices that put people in close contact or require them to handle objects and pass them back and forth.**

- All pantries must move to a pre-pack system, adjusting for household size and adding frozen and refrigerated as the packages go out the door.** “Drive-up” is safest; advise people to stay in their vehicles. You can collect required information, view their ID and ask them to self-declare income *as they remain in their vehicles*. If you have volunteers to load, place groceries in the vehicle cargo area. If you can’t load a vehicle, set bags outside (on a bench or table; not the ground) to self-load.
- “Walk-up” is necessary** in some communities and neighborhoods. Keep people outside and 6’ apart. Speak loudly, slowly and clearly when you’re talking to folks outside; we have participants with hearing issues and folks with hearing aids pick up ambient noises. Set packages down rather than handing them to participants; avoid contact.
- Pantries may change hours and/or switch to an appointment schedule** for most pickups with proper public notice and notice to your EFO. Follow communication strategies below.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- Ask volunteer to update their emails and phone numbers.** Make sure your volunteers remain reachable.
- Update your pantry’s outgoing phone message at least weekly.** Even if you maintain current hours of service, people will seek to confirm that you are open before they come. It is particularly important to change your outgoing message if you are forced to change or reduce hours due to volunteer shortages.
- Advise participants to check the pantry’s phone message to confirm you’re open.** Their ability to verify this will reduce anxiety about food security. If you must close for any reason, make sure that you include that in your outgoing message and refer them to another pantry.
- Ensure your pantry’s after-hours, emergency phone number is current and posted on the front door.** You may now use 2-1-1 to satisfy this requirement.
- If your pantry takes phone messages, continue checking them regularly.** Participants who live alone might need assistance. Designate a reliable monitor for incoming messages and discuss what you will do if someone leaves a distress message.
- Ask local law-enforcement to hold pre-packed foods for households at their station.** Restock as needed.
- Notify 2-1-1 if your pantry must change hours or close temporarily.**

IF YOU DETERMINE YOU MUST TEMPORARILY CLOSE THE PANTRY OR MODIFY HOURS

- Make an independent decision about your pantry’s “open” and “closed” status.** In weather situations, many pantries close when schools close. However, closing an emergency food pantry for an extended period can cause hardship. Whether or not schools close, please remain open if you can do it safely.
- Immediately contact 2-1-1 as well as your Emergency Feeding Organization and food bank that serves your pantry** (your community action partner, the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, Feed My People, the Hunger Task Force of La Crosse, United Way of St. Croix County, Channel One, Second Harvest Food Bank, Sheboygan Food Bank, Racine Food Bank, Second Harvest Northern Lakes, and/or any other suppliers you have) to let them know that you must close, when and how long. Update them as the situation changes.
- Immediately post public notice by phone, on the door, and by social media.**
- Make sure your EFO can still contact you -- whether or not your pantry remains open as planned.**
- Notify Wisconsin TEFAP Coordinator, Kitty Kocol at kittykocol@dhs.wisconsin.gov** if you determine you must close or change hours temporarily.