

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in our Community Food Programs

updated April 1, 2020

As of March 17, 2020 the Premier of Ontario declared a provincial state of emergency due to the circulation of COVID-19 virus. As part of the declaration, the province has mandated the closure of restaurants and bars where seating is available; however, during this time those restaurants do have the option of converting to a takeout and delivery service only.

Community food programs such as food banks and community meal programs provide valuable support. Many of these programs are operated by volunteers and seniors that are a part of a high-risk population; therefore the Health Unit is providing advice to ensure that these important programs continue to operate in a safe manner protecting both the clients and volunteers.

Meal programs will be required to move to a takeout model similar to the way restaurants are adapting their services. Food banks are also advised to adapt their services. Strategies could include: pre-packaged food boxes, limit the number of clients in the food bank at one time, setting one-on-one appointments for clients. Ensure that social distancing (2 meters or 6 feet) and good hand hygiene is maintained. Volunteers who are sick must remain at home; clients must be advised to do the same. Included is a sign titled Protecting Yourself & Those Around You COVID-19 and must be posted at entrances and within your premises.

If you choose to operate your food premises as a takeout and delivery these steps are required to help reduce the transmission of the COVID-19:

- **Remind staff /volunteers to monitor themselves for illness and to stay at home when they are sick;**
- **Cough and sneeze into your elbow** not your hand, avoid touching your mouth nose and eyes;
- Practice social distancing with your staff and customers (2 meters or 6 feet);
- Have a strategy in place to prevent people from gathering, this includes inside and outside your establishment.
- Servers and food handlers must properly **wash hands with soap and water** at the designated hand sinks;
- Avoid shaking hands; use an alternate method of greeting customers, volunteers and trades people;
- Provide alcohol-based (check the labels for product with at least 60% alcohol) hand sanitizers for customers' use by placing them at convenient/accessible locations;
- Be sure to adhere to proper food safety practices i.e. proper food temperatures (hot and cold), hand washing, cleaning and sanitizing. For more information on food safety please visit our website
- Practice proper dishwashing; ensure dishware is being sanitized as per the Ontario Food Premises Regulation.
- Have a certified food handler on each shift. Information about becoming a certified food handler can be found on our website.
- **Use sanitizing solution to sanitize commonly touched surfaces and objects** frequently throughout the day. These surfaces may include: electronics, doorknobs, microwave buttons, faucet handles, counter tops, cash machines, beverage dispenser buttons/knobs, salt and pepper shakers, condiment bottles, washrooms, etc. Change the sanitizing solution at least once every two hours.

As the situation surrounding COVID-19 continues to develop, additional precautionary measures may be required. For the latest up to date local information on COVID-19 please visit our website at www.healthunit.org.