



Cambridge
Public Health
Department

How To Safely Operate a Food Pantry During COVID-19

1. **Ask clients to stay outside the pantry. Have food ready in boxes, new paper, or plastic bags. Try one or more of these methods:**
 - **Distribute pre-bagged food outside if at all possible:** Staff and clients should stay 6 feet apart from each other while food is distributed.
 - **Delivery:** Use a delivery service if you can.
 - **Outdoor pickup:** Ask people to wait in line outside the pantry door or another place to pick up pre-bagged groceries. People must stand six feet apart to wait.
 - **Drive-through or Drive-up:** Ask people to stay in their car and they will be given their bagged groceries.
 - A loading dock or food delivery parking space can be used for drive-through.
 - *How to deliver food to a car:* The driver opens the trunk and gets back into the car. Staff should wear masks, and put the bag of food in the trunk, and close the trunk. The worker and driver should always stay at least 6 feet apart.
 - *If you have parking spaces:* Each car gets a number as they drive in. Numbers are placed on the car windshield. Staff give out bagged food to each car by number.

2. **If clients come inside the pantry:**
 - Allow only a few people to come in at one time. Clients and staff need to be at least 6 feet apart from each other at all times. Pantries will need to predetermine the maximum number of clients allowed and only allow this number of people inside at one time. Depending on the size of the room, this may result in only one or two clients inside at one time.
 - Arrange tables, chairs, and shelves so that people can always stay at least 6 feet apart inside, including staff.
 - Mark every 6 feet with tape or chalk wherever anyone might stand or work (inside and outside).
 - Everyone should wear a mask or use a cloth face covering to be admitted.
 - Staff should greet clients outside and explain what will happen, staying 6 feet apart.
 - Clients should wait in line outside, standing 6 feet apart. When a person is asked to come in, they are given a bag of groceries. No personal shopping is allowed.
 - Ask clients to use hand sanitizer as they enter (if you have any).
 - Keep conversations short so people will move through quickly. This will reduce risk for staff.

3. Follow [CDC guidelines](#) on cleaning and disinfecting when cleaning the pantry space.

Take a photo of the QR code or type the link into your browser to find the CDC guidelines



<https://bit.ly/2B7ZzQp>

- Identify highly touched surfaces, then clean and disinfect them at least twice a day.
- Find CDC-approved cleaning products [here](#).

Take a photo of the QR code or type the link into your browser to find the CDC products



<https://bit.ly/2yJYPQO>

- For bleach use: 5 tablespoons bleach per gallon of water.
- Staff should follow [CDC Grocery and Food Retail Worker safety guidelines](#) for masks, gloves, and hand-washing, and keep 6 feet apart.

Take a photo of the QR code or type the link into your browser to find the CDC guidelines



<https://bit.ly/2M3spUr>

4. Cancel cooking demos, courses, and camps. Do not offer food samples.

5. Tell clients how to use the pantry and the hours of operation.

- Post flyers outside.
- Tell people they will not be allowed in the pantry without a mask. Supply masks if possible.
- Update your website and social media daily (or as soon as something changes).
- Send an email and change flyers outside the pantry with each change to operation or hours.
- Ask patrons who are sick (or in quarantine or contact isolation) to stay home, and refer them to the **Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee** (#617-868-2900) where they can be connected to resources.

6. Operational Considerations

- Ensure all staff wash their hands frequently and use gloves, masks, and stay 6 feet apart during all operations prior to opening, during open hours, and at clean-up.
- When distributing bagged food and supplies at a central place (for those without cars):
 - Schedule times for pickup.
 - Plentiful is a free reservation app for pantries: <https://www.plentifulapp.com/pantries>
 - Allow fewer people in per appointment.
 - Text clients when their food is ready, to help prevent crowding.
 - Give enough food for 2-4 weeks, instead of only 1 week.
 - Do not use reusable bags.

- Take away chairs, tables, pens, and papers where possible. When necessary, use plastic tables and chairs that can be easily cleaned.
- Help everyone (clients and staff) keep 6 feet apart:
 - Where lines form, mark every 6 feet with tape or chalk (use sidewalks and walls).
 - Post staff outside to tell clients to stay 6 feet apart.
 - Open for longer hours or open on another day.
 - Open special hours for those with compromised immune systems, the elderly (60+), and pregnant women.
- Tell clients that the food is safe:
 - “According to the CDC, the coronavirus is transmitted through close personal contact, not food. We will take every possible measure to ensure that we distribute food safely.”
- Tell clients why the pantry is pre-bagging food:
 - “We understand that this model does not allow for choice of products but it is for your own safety. We will go back to normal operations as soon as it is safe to do so. Please know that your bag will have healthy foods from each of the main categories including: dairy, meats, dry goods, and produce.”
- **Ask for online donations of money rather than food** to help stop disease spread, promote physical distancing and stay-at-home orders.

Updated: 4-14-21