

Catholic Mutual... "CARES"

Best Practices for Emergency Food Preparation and Distribution

During this time of global pandemic, your parish may wish to be involved in assisting the community to help those in need. Some methods of helping during the COVID-19 pandemic could be distributing food and/or aid to the less fortunate or elderly. This may mean the school or church facilities/kitchen will be used to prepare food for distribution. Below you will find best practices for proper food handling and distribution.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, it is imperative to follow all recommendations of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and your State Health Department.

The CDC is recommending individuals employ social distancing by maintaining approximately 6 feet from others, when possible. In food production/processing, an evaluation should be made to identify and implement changes that increase separation. Careful consideration should be given if the full 6 feet may not be possible in some food facilities.

The risk of transmitting COVID-19 to another person is dependent on distance between people, the duration of the exposure, and the effectiveness of hygiene practices and sanitation. When it is impractical for people in these settings to maintain social distancing, effective hygiene practices should be maintained to reduce the chance of spreading the virus.

IMPORTANT: Maintaining social distancing in the absence of effective hygiene practices may not prevent the spread of this virus. Food facilities and distribution should be vigilant in their hygiene practices, including frequent and proper hand-washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces.

Food Preparation

Serious injury or illness can arise from the consumption of contaminated food. A few simple steps can help control this exposure.

- Food must be stored at the proper temperature. Prior to the food being used, it should be inspected for any signs of contamination or spoilage.
- Once food is opened for use or preparation, proper handling and storage precautions must still be followed. Frozen foods should never be thawed on a counter top, but instead thawed in the refrigerator or in a bag under cold running water.
- Employees or volunteers should wash their hands with soap and warm water before handling food. Also, gloves and hair restraints should be worn. All kitchen surfaces and utensils should be kept clean and sanitary.
- Prior to distribution, it must always be verified that food has been cooked thoroughly in order to destroy bacteria. It is recommended that thermometers be utilized to determine if the internal temperature of the food has reached a safe temperature. Internal temperatures should reach 160 degrees. For poultry, temperatures need to reach 185 degrees. While serving, food that will not immediately be dispensed should be kept at above 140 degrees for warm food and below 40 degrees for foods served cold.

Food distribution

- PPE such as gloves should be worn when working with or distributing food.
- Face masks should be reserved for individuals who are sick. To adequately protect yourself, maintain the 6-foot distance recommended by the CDC.
- Customers may stand in line as long as staff can monitor the line to maintain 6-foot social distancing. It is also recommended signs be placed to direct people picking up food.
- If beverages are provided, they must be filled by employee/volunteer workers. No self-service beverages should be allowed.
- Give single-use items like napkins and condiments directly to the customer instead of putting them in a self-service area.
- Customers should not be allowed to consume food on site.

Drive thru Pickup

- Designate the hours in which food will be provided for church members to pick up.
- Signs should be placed for the entrance and exit from the parking lot(s).
- Additional signs may be necessary to direct traffic where to pick up food.
- If the parish has a large campus and a high quantity of people picking up food, the parish may want to consider designating someone outside to direct vehicle traffic.
- Consider having a volunteer or team member ready to deliver food to the vehicle window.
- If this is not an option, have a designated person control the number of people allowed into the church or school facility. To follow CDC guidelines, the number of people allowed inside the facility should not compromise the social distance recommendation of 6 feet.
- If allowing people inside of the facility, place a hand sanitizing station at the entrance and exit.

Volunteer Delivery Drivers

It should also be noted that individuals that are volunteering to deliver food for the elderly and those who are quarantined should follow all recommendations above. While under normal circumstances, our recommendation is that all volunteer drivers be properly screened and complete the online Defensive Driving course available on CMG Connect. However, given the National State of Emergency, we understand this may not be feasible and ask that you practice good judgement with your selection process of volunteer drivers.

Should you need any further assistance during this time, please do not hesitate to contact your Risk Management Representative.