

Planning for Emergencies and Ensuring Staff Safety

Tips for Maintaining Meal Service Operations During the Coronavirus

This document was last updated on 4/7/2020 and will continue to be updated.

For information on program options and waivers to support meal service during school closures related to the coronavirus, see this [FAQ](#). For more ideas on meal distribution models, logistics, and promotion, see [Emerging Strategies and Tactics for Meal Service During School Closures](#).

Staffing and Emergency Planning

- Assess staff ability to work and their ability to work at different locations as needed.
- If needed, request help from other employees within your organization who may not have work right now, such as administrators, afterschool activity providers, or coaches.
- If short-staffed during extended closures, look into hiring laid off restaurant or food service employees, whether as contractors, temporary employees, or permanent staff.
- Create an emergency staffing plan and contingency plan for closures.
 - Ideally, avoid maxing out staff capacity from the start.
 - If permitted to serve meals for multiple days at one time, consider consolidating meal preparation and distribution to one or two times per week in order to limit staff exposure.
 - If possible, spread out meal preparation across multiple kitchen or locations so that others are available if one location needs to be closed down.
 - Identify staff who can serve as back-ups should an employee become unable to work or an entire team needs to be quarantined.
 - Create a plan for covering operations or distribution at sites affected by closures, like sanitizing kitchens and pulling in back-up staff, or building up capacity at other kitchen locations and serving the site as a stop on a delivery route.

Emergency Communications

Develop a communication plan for notifying staff, the state agency, local public health officials, and the general public should a site need to close due to detection of COVID-19 among staff.

- Share your communication plan with your organization's or district's leadership team, including the Superintendent and School Board.
- Defer to the guidance of local public health officials, but likely, staff who worked with the affected staff member will need to self-quarantine and monitor for symptoms for 14 days.
- Activate your emergency staffing plan.
 - In addition to contacting staff, determine whether any vendors or partners need to be alerted in order to redirect deliveries or change other operations.

- If unable to cover to gap created by the site or kitchen closure, coordinate with other program operators or vendors who can serve those sites or families.
- If needed, ask the state agency for support identifying alternative operators or vendors who could help to fill the gap.
- Tell the state agency if and how your operations are changing to cover meal distribution for the affected site or sites served by the affected kitchen.
- Share details about any changes in operations with your organization's or district's communications team in order to notify the public and make any necessary changes to site listings. Or, provide information about other meal distribution sites or resources.
- Notify anyone who may have come to the affected site about the detection of COVID-19, precautions taken, and if and how operations are changing to cover meal distribution.
 - For schools, this may include parent email, robocall, or texting systems along with the school and/or district's social media accounts and website.
 - For non-school sites, this may include signs posted at the meal distribution site along with the site and/or sponsor's social media accounts and website.

Staff Safety

- If your school, district, or organization has a nurse on staff, ask for support with health education for staff or proactively asking employees about symptoms.
- Ensure that staff understand the importance of not coming to work while sick or under self-quarantine due to possible exposure.
 - Remind staff that they may still transmit COVID-19 without or before developing symptoms, which can take up to 14 days from the time of exposure.
- Encourage frequent handwashing for at least 20 seconds each time.
 - Allow staff to take needed time for handwashing before beginning work and after sneezing or touching their phone or face.
 - Refer to the [Centers for Disease Control](#) for guidance and resources.
- Provide gloves and urge staff to change them as needed, like after touching their face.
- In accordance with [Centers for Disease Control guidance](#), provide masks for staff, both those preparing meals and those distributing them.
 - Request support from community members who could sew reusable cloth masks.
 - Ask if maintenance staff have masks or other protective equipment they could share, or see if masks are on hand for craft or construction activities.
- Regularly sanitize hard surfaces, especially in high-touch or high-traffic areas, both in preparation areas and where distribution occurs.
- Allow staff to stay distanced during meal preparation to the greatest extent possible.
 - Space out work stations and move as many activities as possible, like bagging or assembly, out of cramped kitchens and into unused spaces like the cafeteria.

- Have just one individual responsible for each task or workstation.
- Limit how many staff access storage areas or large equipment like refrigerators.
- Deliver needed items to workstations rather than handing them off personally.
- Refer to LunchAssist.org's [COVID-19 page](#) for additional safety and distancing resources, including signs and infographics that you can post for staff.

Meal Distribution Logistics

- Implement appropriate safety and distancing measures for your distribution model.
 - Arrange for no-contact meal distribution that maintains six feet of distance between staff and families by using tables or carts, or placing meals directly into the trunk of vehicles, rather than personally handing out meals.
 - Ensure that families stay spaced out while waiting for meals.
 - Try using chalk, tape, or traffic cones to mark out six feet and show how far apart families should wait.
 - Extend or stagger pick-up times to minimize crowds.
 - If approved, distribute meals for more than one day at a time to minimize contact.
- For schools, offer no-contact direct home delivery for families that have tested positive for COVID-19, are experiencing symptoms, need to self-quarantine, or have conditions that prevent them from leaving home. Or, refer those families to other food resources.