



**Developed in consultation with the Department of Human Services in its role as the lead agency on the Emergency Food Systems Task Force**

## **COVID-19 2020 Questions and Answers re: The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**

Will be updated frequently. Last update: March 23, 2020.

## Contents

Frequently Asked Questions .....	3
Food Availability: .....	3
Volunteers and Supplies:.....	5
Service Delivery and Eligibility:.....	5
Staff and Volunteer Safety and Health.....	7
Food Safety:.....	7
Serving ALL Communities .....	8

Minnesota Department of Health is coordinating the state's response to COVID-19. Please visit their website for the most up to date information: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html>

As guidance is updated, Hunger Solutions Minnesota will post or link to it and email a notice to food shelves that changes have been made. In addition, Hunger Solutions Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Human Services recommends following the guidance issued by Minnesota Department of Health and the CDC.

## Frequently Asked Questions re: Food Shelves and TEFAP

Questions answered below were posted on March 23, 2020. This list will be updated as new information is received.

A general update: about what is happening at the Minnesota Department of Human Services regarding TEFAP and the Minnesota Food Shelf Program (MFSP)?

- MN DHS is working with Hunger Solutions to issue expedited spring grants for food shelves – should receive checks by end March.
- MN DHS continues to order TEFAP food.
- Remain in close contact with USDA to learn about any potential changes in food availability or policy – at this point there are no changes.
- Continue to receive TEFAP and trade mitigation food.
- MN DHS staff surveyed 150 food shelves (40% + of TEFAP partners, email survey to those who weren't reached) to identify concerns.
- Partnering with the Governor's Office, food banks, Hunger Solutions Minnesota, and many other public and private partners to identify and plan for the distribution of resources.

## Food Availability:

**1. Will there be additional TEFAP available? If so what is the plan for delivering to food shelves?**  
*The Families First Act included additional funds for TEFAP purchases. At this time we do not know when the food will be made available, but will stay in touch as we learn more.*

**2. Could the milk be more fairly allocated so that clients of large food shelves have the same opportunity to get milk as clients of the small food shelves?**

*Food banks retain that responsibility. Contact your food bank.*

**3. How is the state going to ensure there is enough food for growing food insecure residents? We can't have food shelves running out of food.**

*When MN receive offerings from USDA, we have been taking our full allotment, including trade mitigation. We are accepting as much food as we can in turns of TEFAP. DHS is working with partners to identify additional streams of food and funds.*

*DHS has been in communication with food banks recently and have asked for inventory update. If you are anticipating increases, talk to your food bank – we hope to hear those messages from food banks.*

*There will be extra food money available so we can order more, comparison of food money – it's comparable to what we spend in a year (positive). Haven't heard that trade mitigation food will stop or be decreased which greatly helps food amounts. We will take advantage of every food offering and penny offered.*

**4. Can we consider letting clients come more than once a month?**

*Yes, MN DHS TEFAP staff encourages serving clients more than once a month. If you can double the food given on that one visit/month, please do that. Use all flexibilities you are able to do. All of these choices are going to look different depending on what your set up is as a food shelf and resources you have available*

**5. We have a local church who does cooked meals one day per week but they do have leftover cooked food. They would like to distribute that to a food shelf so they can get it to their clients. Is that possible or does the church need to distribute that food themselves?**

*Please check with food bank.*

**6. Looking at the TEFAP calendar on Hunger Solutions, what does the different colors means? Bonus, Entitlement, Trade Mitigation and combinations? Which foods are guaranteed?**

*Entitlement foods are most reliable and what MN DHS uses funds to purchase. Very rarely does this stream have order cancellations. Bonus foods are surplus throughout the country – only a small percentage of those get cancelled. Trade mitigation – MN DHS has seen some cancellations mainly meat – pork. We update any cancelled orders as soon as we are aware.*

**7. Is there a plan, as food shelves have to make the difficult decision to close as they cannot meet the demands? Mostly from a staffing or volunteer standpoint. Very limited staffing and many to most all volunteers are 65+?**

*If you are concerned about that, reach out to regional food bank ASAP, problem solve what else there might be available, and let Hunger Solutions know. It's crucial we have accurate and up-to-date info on food resources available to people. Reach out also to your other community food networks.*

## **Volunteers and Supplies:**

- 1. Can someone tell the administration to stop telling people to volunteer at the food bank and food shelves? The last thing we need are unnecessary volunteers coming to us. We are trying to limit person to person contact.**

*MN DHS is working as part of a much broader emergency response team – one concern is volunteer availability and getting volunteers where they need to be. MN DHS will communicate this concern to the team.*

- 2. We need cardboard boxes for pre-packed boxes along with sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer, and fresh produce and meat because our grocery store donations are 90% less than normal.**

*MN DHS heard this need in the phone survey results and is working with partners to identify how to get these resources and funds to food shelves.*

## **Service Delivery and Eligibility:**

- 1. How should I change my food shelf service delivery to be safe:**

- Pre-packing boxes is encouraged – support decisions of health and safety of volunteers and staff
- Intake – no client signatures are required at food distributions/data privacy/sign-in sheets/TEFAP forms – staff can collect household information verbally
- Still need to post federal poverty guidelines displayed along with data
- Verbal verification OK for TEFAP eligible, changed to list weekly income for allowability (as many people that need the food are eligible – was sent out this week from Courteney) also check out Hunger Solutions TEFAP page for a chart with weekly income limits.

- 2. We have designed a method of distribution that allows us to work with a single patron at a time, keeping our volunteers six feet away from each other and from the patrons. This allows us to still have client choice while keeping within Covid-19 guidelines. Do we need to change this?**

*No, we want to make sure all recommendation for health and safety are being adhered to, don't put yourself in danger. MN DHS is not requiring food shelves to do any specific type of distribution. Each food shelf can make decisions on its own while following best practices and*

*MDH guidance. Although MN DHS does strongly suggest suspending client choice -- but is not prohibiting it if you are following recommended health and safety guidelines. Please be in touch with Hunger Solutions and MN DHS to share how your food shelf is redesigning services so others can learn from you.*

**3. Who should I call if I have to change my food shelf's schedule?**

Call your food bank agency representative and send your updates to Hunger Solutions staff [jwestfall@hungersolutions.org](mailto:jwestfall@hungersolutions.org) and [jwalker@hungersolutions.org](mailto:jwalker@hungersolutions.org)

**4. How does a food shelf display required TEFAP info if people are driving up to collect pre-packed food?**

*Print data privacy and post wherever, tag board, outside of building, back of a clipboard, poster size, in any places clients can see.*

**5. Can you confirm if there should be 10 people or less in their space including staff and clients?**

*Current recommendations is that groups of people should not exceed 10. If that number changes we will have to adapt or change. Continue social distancing.*

**6. Can we use our unused TEFAP allocation from a host site that had temporarily closed their facility and give it out at another site under our organizational supervision – as a part of an effort to serve families where it is most convenient?**

*When TEFAP is ordered at the agency level it needs to stay there. Mobile sites have some flexibility, talk to your food bank. We support you in using the food and giving it out where it is most important. Still has to go to households that self-report as eligible. Opportunities to add new sites – can still expand (very quick process can expedite)*

**7. Do you have guidance for how food shelves are handling those that visit a shelf who don't qualify under TEFAP guidelines? Are other shelves boxing specific non-TEFAP items?**

*TEFAP food shelves now use weekly income guidelines, because people's incomes may be constantly changing. Participants self-report their income and food shelf staff have a shared goal to serve as many people as possible. If someone says they aren't eligible for TEFAP, do your best faith effort to give them non-TEFAP foods*

**8. Could food shelf staff pick up food for their family as well at the food shelf?**

*Yes, if the household eligible for TEFAP.*

## Staff and Volunteer Safety and Health

1. **What do I do if I find out a volunteer or staff tested positive for COVID-19?**

*Call MDH COVID-19 hotline and they will give guidance on what to do. 651-201-3920 OR 1-800-657-3903*

2. **Can you provide best practices on screening volunteers prior to volunteering (i.e. age, connection to anyone with COVID-19, COVID-19 symptoms, etc.) For example, what if someone who is 70 wants to volunteer, and or someone who has been in contact with someone with COVID-19 wants to volunteer. How can we best navigate that without being discriminatory but ensuring we are following guidance of CDC?**

*Following MDH guidance. We are working on very quick no frills welcome to the food shelf – volunteer orientation. Basic food safety practices and civil rights.*

## Food Safety:

1. **What is the best practice to guide us with fresh produce and bread rescue from grocery stores? Do we need to quarantine fresh produce?**

*We are in communication with MDH and the food banks – will update when we have more information.*

2. **Is there concern about air transmission of the virus while shoppers pass by? Or is touching it while deciding?**

*Please refer to the MDH website about COVID-19*

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/basics.html>

3. **Is there any requirement to disinfecting or cleaning packages of food received (goes towards life of the virus on hard materials)?**

*USDA has not provided any guidance on this topic. Please refer to the MDH website about safe handling of food.*

## Potential Future Executive Orders and How they Effect Food Shelves:

1. **If there is a complete state shut down ordered are food shelves a business that should try to stay open if at all possible? The Big question: What will be the plan if “shelter in place” order is given by the governor? Will food shelves remain the source of hunger relief? Or will other**

**emergency governmental workers step in? How would food shelf staff and volunteers be treated in case of any stay at home orders?**

*No shelter or stay at home order yet has been issued. This decision would come from the Governor and the Minnesota Department of Health. If that order is issued, we will provide direction. MN DHS and Hunger Solutions are in contact with emergency preparedness teams that would help inform a response to this question – should the situation come up.*

## **Serving ALL Communities**

- 1. As you may know, many low income and SNAP eligible families from ethnic populations are not utilizing food banks. Would it be possible to employ/use ethnic stores as food distribution channels in addition to existing food banks?**

*Please work with your food bank to add new TEFAP distribution sites. MN DHS encourages this approach – as long as the new sites are added through the regular approval process. The process of approving new sites should move quickly.*

- 2. What about the food shelves that are closing because they are located in hospitals/clinics and run by seniors that do not want to be exposed to COVID19? Do you have a plan for those communities that may not have a food shelf to go to now?**

*Please connect with neighboring food shelves to partner or see what they are doing that is working that could be adapted for your site. Talk to your agency specialist at the food bank or food partner agency.*

- 3. We have a large Asian clientele that we serve and they have concerns about what your plan is as far as providing culturally relevant food for seniors and families?**

*Link available to order through TEFAP, some limitations and constantly advocating. Take a look at the list and check with your food bank – their list can be broader than ours. It's a frustration on our end as well. Can only order certain things at certain times.*