

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

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Considerations for Outdoor Farmers Markets

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Farmers market managers should consider the recommendations below to help ensure safe access to food while helping prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to food security in the United States. Access to healthy food options and nutrition are an important part of overall physical and mental health. Across the United States, farmers markets have been named an essential service because of their role in supporting local farms and providing communities access to fresh, healthy food during the pandemic. Outdoor farmers markets provide a lower risk shopping option with immediate and lasting benefits for shoppers and the community at-large.

These considerations are meant to supplement—not replace—any state, local, territorial, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, and regulations that organizations must follow. Farmers market managers should collaborate with [state and local health officials](#) to determine whether to implement these considerations as-is or tailor them to their community's needs. Farmers market managers should continue monitoring the spread of COVID-19 in the community they serve and have a plan in place to adjust their operations as needed.

Farmers market managers may also benefit from reviewing CDC's COVID-19 guidance and considerations on [community based organizations, workplaces, events and gatherings](#), and [food service providers](#). Farmers market managers should consider CDC's information on [people at higher risk of severe illness](#).

Slowing the spread of COVID-19

Coronaviruses, such as the one that causes COVID-19, are thought to spread mostly from [person to person](#) through respiratory droplets emitted when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. The droplets containing virus are spread in the air and can be inhaled in the lungs or land on the mouth, nose or eyes of people nearby. A person also might be exposed to the virus causing COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, including food or food packaging, that has been contaminated with the virus when an infected person coughs or sneezes near it, and then touches their own mouth, nose, or eyes. However, this is not thought to be the main way the [virus spreads](#). Risk of [transmission from food, food packaging, and shopping bags is considered very low](#), but there are other, possible routes of COVID-19 transmission, such as:

- Being in close contact (within 6 feet) with people you don't live with, especially people who are not wearing a mask. The more people you interact with, and the longer those interactions last, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread;
- Touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your own mouth, nose, or eyes.

Outdoor activities generally are lower risk than indoor activities but there are still important ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 that should be followed:

- [Staying home when sick](#)
- [Social distancing](#)

- [Wearing a mask](#)
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a [hand sanitizer](#) that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- [Cleaning and disinfection](#)

Promote healthy behaviors

Encourage people to stay home when sick.

- Staff, volunteers, and vendors should [stay home](#) if they have tested positive for or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#), or have recently had [close contact](#) with a person with symptoms of, or diagnosed with, COVID-19.
- Educate staff, volunteers, and vendors about when they should [stay home](#) and when it is safe [to be around others](#).
- Actively encourage customers using signage, social media, or other communication platforms that your market commonly uses, to stay home if they have tested positive for or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#), or have recently had [close contact](#) with a person with symptoms of, or diagnosed with, COVID-19.

Encourage people to socially distance.

- Staying at least six feet apart from others, even when you are outside, reduces the chance that you will be exposed to the virus from respiratory droplets emitted by others.
- Many people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms or no symptoms, but they can still spread the virus to others. Staying apart reduces your risk of getting COVID-19.
- Social distancing is most effective when it is used along with other prevention strategies, including wearing masks.

Masks

- Require staff, volunteers, and vendors to use [masks](#). Masks are an important means of reducing viral spread and are essential during times when social distancing is difficult. Provide information to all staff and volunteers on [proper use and washing of masks](#).
- If feasible, provide masks for staff, volunteers, and vendors and consider asking them to bring extra masks, in case their mask gets wet or soiled, as well as a sealable plastic bag or other container to store masks when not in use.
- Encourage customers to bring and use [masks](#). If feasible, provide masks for those who may not have one.

Hand hygiene

- Provide handwashing stations or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for all, including customers, market staff, volunteers, and vendors, and encourage vendors to offer the same at their booth.
- Proper [hand hygiene](#) is an important infection control measure. Ensure vendors, market staff, and volunteers wash their hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available or accessible, provide an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Key times to clean hands in general include:
 - Before, during, and after preparing or handling food
 - Before eating food
 - After using the toilet
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After touching frequently touched surfaces

- After putting on, touching, or removing masks
- Additional workplace-specific times to clean hands include:
 - Before and after work shifts and periodically throughout shift
 - Before and after work breaks
 - After touching money or objects that have been handled by customers, such as produce, other market food, and reusable grocery bags
 - Before putting on and taking off disposable gloves
 - After taking out the trash

Clear signage and communications

- Ensure that all staff, volunteers, vendors, and customers are aware of market policies and procedures. Signs with market hours of operation and safety precautions should be posted at each entrance/exit and near shared areas. If possible, make the same information available on your website and social media platforms.
- Post [signs](#) in highly visible locations (e.g., at building entrances, in restrooms) that [promote everyday protective measures](#) and describe how to [stop the spread](#)  of germs by [properly washing hands](#) and [properly wearing a mask](#)  .
- Consider developing signs and messages in different formats (e.g., large print, Braille, American Sign Language) for people who have low vision.
- Consider adding signs in other languages commonly spoken in your community and visuals tailored for low literacy audiences.

Maintain healthy environments

Consider modifications you can make to promote social distancing, including:

- Providing different ways for ordering and pick-up to reduce the number of in-person interactions (e.g., curbside box pickup). Set up designated pick-up areas.
- Where possible, redesigning market layouts to increase the distance between customers in line and walking throughout the market (e.g., increase space between vendor booths; create one-way traffic flow). Ensure that market layout modifications are accessible for all persons (e.g., ADA-compliant paths).
- Limiting the number of customers to reduce crowding and lines to meet social distancing guidelines.
- Installing physical barriers like sneeze guards and partitions, particularly in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least 6 feet apart (e.g., vendor booths).
- Posting clear and prominent directional and physical distancing signage for all walkways, entry and exit ways, vendor booths, and spaces that can easily become crowded (e.g., customers waiting in line).

Safe operations include:

- Being aware of local and state regulatory agency policies related to providing essential services and group gatherings to determine if your market can be held, and if there are restrictions limiting the number of attendees or vendors.
- Limiting market activities that target individuals identified as higher risk for serious illness for COVID-19, if feasible. If these events or activities continue to be offered, consider creating a schedule that includes special shopping hours for at-risk or vulnerable populations (e.g., senior shopping hours).
- Where feasible, implementing cashless payment systems and continue to accept SNAP EBT. If your market traditionally uses hard to-clean vouchers (e.g., wooden tokens) for SNAP EBT transactions or other incentives, consider alternatives.

- When exchanging paper and coin money
 - Do not touch your face afterwards.
 - Ask customers to place cash on the table or directly in a cashbox, rather than directly into your hand.
 - Place money directly on the table when providing change back to customers.
 - Wipe the table between each customer at checkout.
- Avoiding using cloth table coverings or other hard to clean table covers.
- If possible, vendor booths should have a designated person for handling cash/tokens and another for handling food or food products.
- Limiting or suspending taste testing, cooking demonstrations, and/or other food sampling activities.
- If your market offers prepared food for immediate consumption, consider limiting to take-out orders only.
- Consider limiting or suspending non-essential market services or events like live music.
- Discouraging customers from touching items they do not plan to purchase.
- Consider regular symptom screenings of staff, vendors or others that come onsite, and have a plan for if anyone arrives or becomes ill. For guidance related to screening of staff, please refer to CDC's [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) and the "Prevent Transmission Among Employees" section of [CDC's Resuming Business Toolkit](#) .
- Train staff, volunteers, and vendors on new COVID-19 procedures. If possible, conduct training virtually so all can attend, and no crowds will gather.
- Require staff, volunteers, and vendors to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water (or use hand sanitizer) frequently before, during, and after shifts.
- Consider asking vendors to pre-bag or pre-portion items for sale prior to market.
- Staggering eating/break times and identify a designated area for staff and volunteers to take breaks where social distancing can be maintained.
- Discouraging customers and vendors from bringing [pets](#) except — [service animals](#) — to the market.

Cleaning and disinfection

Follow CDC and EPA's [Guidance on Cleaning and Disinfection](#) to prepare and maintain a safe environment for your market workforce, volunteers, vendors and customers. Use EPA-approved [disinfectants against the virus that causes COVID-19](#) . Always read and follow label instructions for each product.

- [Routinely clean, sanitize, and disinfect](#) payment devices, tables, and other high touch surfaces and objects. Require participating market vendors to do the same.
- If you have restrooms or port-a-potties, set up a schedule to frequently clean and disinfect all surfaces, and replenish soap, sanitizers, or paper products.
- Limit or suspend the use of items that are hard to clean and disinfect (e.g., wooden tokens).
- Use disposable [gloves](#) when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash:
 - After using disposable gloves, throw them out in a lined trash can.
 - Do not disinfect or reuse the gloves.
 - [Wash hands](#) after removing gloves.
- Ensure you have enough supplies for market workforce, volunteers, and customers to clean their hands and cover their coughs and sneezes. Supplies include soap, water, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, a way to dry hands, tissues, disinfectant wipes, masks (as feasible), and no-touch trash cans.

Plan for what to do if a staff member, volunteer, vendor, or customer gets sick by referring to relevant sections in [CDC's Considerations for Community-Based Organizations](#) and [Event Planning Q&As](#). Critical infrastructure workers (e.g. farmers) may refer to [CDC Guidance for Critical Infrastructure Workers](#), if applicable.

Additional Resources

[Running Essential Errands](#)

[Food and Food System Resources During COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

[Considerations for Food Pantries and Food Distribution Sites](#)

[Considerations for Outdoor Learning Gardens and Community Gardens](#)

[Communication Resources](#)

For general disease prevention when interacting with animals, follow advice in the [Compendium of Measures to Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings](#)  

For more information on COVID-19 and food, see FAQ pages from the [S. Food and Drug Administration](#)  and the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) 

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Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\)](#), Division of Viral Diseases