

COVID -19 and Food Ministries



26th March 2020

Dear friends,

We are writing to you with regard to food ministries during the COVID-19 pandemic, to provide the following guidelines issued by the Social Service Committee today. These guidelines apply to food ministries, both new and planned, for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will let you know when they no longer apply.

We know many local churches provide regular food services in their local area, whether it is via community kitchen, providing cooked and frozen meals or providing access to a pantry or food hampers. We also know that many local churches are seeking ways to support their local community during the current COVID-19 crisis, and many are considering starting a food ministry. God's people always seek ways to help those in need, and now is no exception. But we must at this time adapt how we do it in order to protect those we are seeking to serve.

Please don't read this as a discouragement to undertaking food ministries! They are a wonderful way of expressing our care to individuals and communities.

The following should be implemented immediately by existing ministries and must be used if you are considering establishing a new ministry:

- All community kitchens, dinners, breakfasts and the like that provide cooked food to groups must cease to operate immediately. This is in line with government restrictions with regard to gatherings and is also protective of the people we serve in terms of the food preparation and provision.
- Pre-packaged goods such as pantry staples may continue to be provided, however the following must be implemented to ensure there is no gathering of people and to reduce the number of people who have touched goods prior to distribution:
 - No fresh produce is to be provided.
 - Goods must be prepacked into a bag for collection.
 - Goods must EITHER:
 - Be prepacked into the bag at least 72 hours before individuals collect the bag. At present, COVID-19 is thought not to survive past 72 hours on hard plastic and stainless steel surfaces.
 - Goods in bags must then be placed in a convenient location for collection and not touched for the 72 hour period.
 - Individuals can be invited to collect a bag after that period. Ideally this should be across a wide period of time so that no groups are formed.

OR

- Be thoroughly wiped down with a good household cleaner by someone who has washed their hands and donned gloves before they clean the items. At present, COVID-19 is thought to be killed by good household cleaners.
- Goods must then be placed in a bag and not touched again until they are collected.
- Individuals can be invited to collect a bag. Ideally this should be across a wide period of time so that no groups are formed.
- Individuals must not be allowed to select items from a pantry or shelf or "fish" through the prepacked bags. They should only touch the bag that they are taking home.

- General rules regarding providing food must be followed. There is a link to NSW Food Authority below that should be reviewed. In particular, food should not be provided that is after its 'use-by' date because it may be unsafe to eat, even though spoilage may not be visible. Food marked as 'best before' can be given away after the best before date has passed, provided the food is not damaged, deteriorated or perished.

This may seem arduous, but the 72 hour "quarantine" for the bags or the wiping down of goods may remove the risk of the virus remaining on any packaging from any person who may have handled it. It's roughly the same as reducing 15 handshakes to nil. We imagine the "quarantine" options could run something like Sunday food bag packing followed by access to the bags on Thursday to Saturday.

- Frozen meals can be provided. While COVID-19 can survive being frozen it does not survive when heated over 70-74 degrees. The following must be implemented:
 - Home cooked frozen meals cannot be provided. The NSW Food Authority requires that we must give the recipient of food provided any information to ensure the ongoing safety of the food regarding food handling and time limits for safe consumption. Unfortunately, with home cooked meals we cannot provide sufficient information about reheating times that will ensure the food reheats above 70 degrees, and most recipients will not have a food thermometer that they can use to check the internal temperature of reheated food to ensure it has reached that temperature.
 - Frozen meals can be purchased from a retailer.
 - The freezer surfaces, especially the handle, should be regularly cleaned.
 - Frozen meals should be distributed by an individual who has washed their hands prior to donning disposable gloves, directly to the recipient

All persons involved in a food ministry must not have:

- Travelled from anywhere overseas in the last 14 days,
- Had a fever in the last 14 days,
- Had acute respiratory symptoms (ie shortness of breath, cough or sore throat) in the last 14 days, or
- Had close contact with anyone who has been confirmed to have COVID-19 / Corona Virus in the last 14 days

General information from the NSW Food Authority can be found [here](#).

Thank you for your cooperation with the above restrictions and I'm sure each congregation providing a food ministry will find ways to be generous to their community within these boundaries. We pray that your generosity to those in need would reflect God's great generosity to us, and that through ministries such as this we can show God's love and mercy to many.

If you have any questions or concerns, please email me at emcclean@pcnsw.org.au and I will do my best to get back to you as quickly as possible.

Kind regards,

Liz McClean
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