

## COVID-19 Guidelines for Farmers Markets Providing Essential Services

Farmers markets are a valuable resource for food supplies during times when social distancing is required. They are considered **essential businesses**, similar to grocery stores. Farmers markets are encouraged to operate if they are able to implement required social distancing and sanitation measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Contact your [local health department](#) for additional information specific to your farmers market.

### Farmers Market Operations

Operating during a pandemic is not business as usual. The following operational guidance may help lower the risk of COVID-19 exposure for the vendors and visitors at your market.

- **Limit your vendors:**
  - Only allow vendors that provide **essential services** at this time. This includes vendors that provide food and supplies needed to maintain health, safety, and sanitation. Check the [Washington essential business list](#) for more information.
  - Do not schedule non-essential services such as musical bands, activities, or entertainment.
- **Put vendor safety plans in place:**

Ask your vendors to complete a safety plan with the following information:

  - A description of the essential service they are providing.
  - How they plan to protect their own health (such as hand hygiene and sneeze barriers).
  - How they plan to protect customers from exposure while at their booth.
  - Their plans to reduce touchpoints in the booth, including:
    - Keeping designated “Display Only” items for customers to view or handle, when possible.
    - Pre-bagging/pre-packaging/pre-weighing food when possible.
    - Discontinuing all product sampling and self-serve areas.
- **Anticipate and communicate change:**
  - The market season will be dynamic and subject to change. Keep a log with notes on what works well and what needs to change before the next market event (such as providing more handwashing sinks).
  - Prior to making major changes, communicate with your local health department for guidance.
  - Use social media, email, or other methods to share updates on operating standards and expectations at the market. For example:
    - Encourage pre-ordering and “single shoppers” (one member of a family shops the market while others stay home) if possible.

## Social or Physical Distancing

Staying at least 6 feet away from others can help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Use the following strategies to ensure physical distancing in all areas of the market:

- **Modify the market layout.**
  - Prevent visitors from gathering in groups. Remove, block-off, or stack tables and chairs in customer seating areas.
  - Define and limit entrances and exits by posting signs at entrance.
  - Space vendor booths at least 6 feet apart. Keep the empty spaces unoccupied.
  - Arrange booths and tables in a single line, rather than a U shape.
  - Provide signs or spacing markers to promote 6 feet of distance between visitors.
  - Do not allow visitors to dine on the premises.
  - Consider allowing visitors to enter the market early if lines develop before you open.
  - Consider prohibiting pets (except for service animals) to help minimize congestion.
  
- **Implement management practices to reduce crowding and maintain social distancing.**
  - Create a plan for how to respond when people aren't in compliance with social distancing measures.
  - Train market staff on social distancing requirements and ways to educate or correct others to maintain a safe environment.
  - Ask your vendors to help ensure social distancing plans are followed.

## Exclude People with Illness

A key way to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to watch for symptoms, and stay home if ill.

- Use a written checklist to assess the health of market staff and vendors before they enter the market. See [Recommended Guidance for Daily COVID-19 Screening of Employees and Visitors](#) for more information.
- Visitors should self-screen for symptoms before they enter the market. Post signs at entrances that outline the symptoms of COVID-19 (see below), with a reminder not to enter if they have symptoms.

**Use the following information as a checklist when assessing market staff and vendors at the entrance.**

1. Individuals with **any** of the following symptoms **should not work in or visit the market:**
  - A fever (100.4°F or higher)
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath
  - A sore throat
  - Muscle aches
  
2. Individuals with any of the above symptoms should:
  - Self-isolate at home.
  - Visit the Department of Health website for information about what to do next:
    - [Testing for COVID-19](#)
    - [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with confirmed COVID-19](#)
    - [What to do if you have symptoms of COVID-19 and have not been around anyone diagnosed with COVID-19](#)

- Contact their health provider by phone if they need medical assistance.
3. Anyone with symptoms should isolate until:
- They have been free from fever for at least 3 days (72 hours), without having used fever-reducing medications; AND,
  - They no longer have respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); AND,
  - At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

## Cloth Face Coverings

There is limited evidence to suggest that cloth face coverings (masks) help reduce COVID-19 transmission. However, these coverings can reduce the release of infectious particles into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes. The Washington State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that people wear cloth face coverings when they are in public settings where they cannot maintain 6 feet of distance from others. To preserve PPE for the medical community, surgical masks or N-95 respirators should not be used by the public. View the full Department of Health guidance on [cloth face masks](#).

## Gloves

Encourage vendors to use poly or vinyl food service gloves when needed. This helps preserve nitrile or latex gloves for the medical community.

## COVID-19 & Food Safety

Food, including fruits and vegetables, is not known to be a source of COVID-19 spread. Follow standard food safety guidelines to help reduce the risk of common foodborne illness. It is ok for your vendors to donate extra products to local food recovery systems.

## Handwashing

Ensure all market staff and attendees have the means to wash or sanitize their hands.

- Install temporary, portable handwashing stations or hand-sanitizing dispensers for market staff, volunteers, and visitors.
  - Handwashing stations must have soap; running, potable warm water; and single-use towels.
  - Antiseptic hand rubs must have at least 60% ethyl alcohol.
  - Designate staff to check and replenish hygiene supplies.
  - Use posters, flags, and announcements to ensure vendors and attendees are aware of sanitation stations.
- Consider requiring vendors to provide their own individual handwashing stations or antiseptic hand rubs for their personal use.

## Cleaning and Sanitizing

Each shift, designate a market worker to ensure that cleaning and sanitization procedures are completed. These procedures should meet the [environmental cleaning guidelines set by the CDC](#).

- Establish procedures for cleaning and sanitizing touchpoints, temporary handwashing stations, merchandise, shelving and displays, and other surfaces.
  - Use routine soap and water to clean surfaces with visible dirt.

- Use an EPA-registered disinfectant per the instructions on the label to disinfect touch points in the market.
- At least once an hour, disinfect high touch areas such as payment devices and restrooms.

## Payment Handling

Money has not been linked to the spread of coronavirus, but it is still important to reduce direct hand contact with shoppers.

- After handling payment, a person should not touch their eyes, nose, or mouth until they have washed their hands.
- When possible, allow mobile, credit card, or other cash-free payment options. Encourage customers to pre-order/pre-pay when possible.
- When handling cash, tokens, checks, or change:
  - Designate a money handler separate from the worker handling products.
  - Ask for exact change to help limit additional handling.
  - Collect payment in a container rather than directly into hands.
- To disinfect wooden tokens, consider the following:
  - “Quarantine” tokens by holding in a container until the next week. Tokens held should not need additional disinfection for COVID-19.
  - Use a cloth wetted with disinfectant to clean wooden tokens or laminated paper, then air dry. Wash hands after disinfecting objects.

## Reusable Grocery Bags

It is unlikely for a person to get COVID-19 by touching reusable shopping bags. According to the CDC, touching surfaces that may have the virus on them is not the main way the virus spreads. The following recommendations can help address additional concerns:

- Encourage customers to bag their own items when using reusable shopping bags.
- Encourage customers to wash their reusable bags before shopping.
- Remind vendors to wash their hands or use hand gel often, and to avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth. See the Department of Health’s [Food Worker and Establishment Guidance on COVID-19](#) for more information.

## Resources & Posters

- [WA State Coronavirus Response for Essential Businesses](#)
- [WA State Printable Posters for Essential Services](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Signage and Posters](#)
- [Dining Area Closures: Guidance for Food Establishments \(PDF\)](#)
- [FDA Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [DOH Food Worker and Establishment Guidance on COVID-19](#)
- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)
- [WA L&I COVID-19 Resources](#)

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